Australian Consumers' Association December 1994

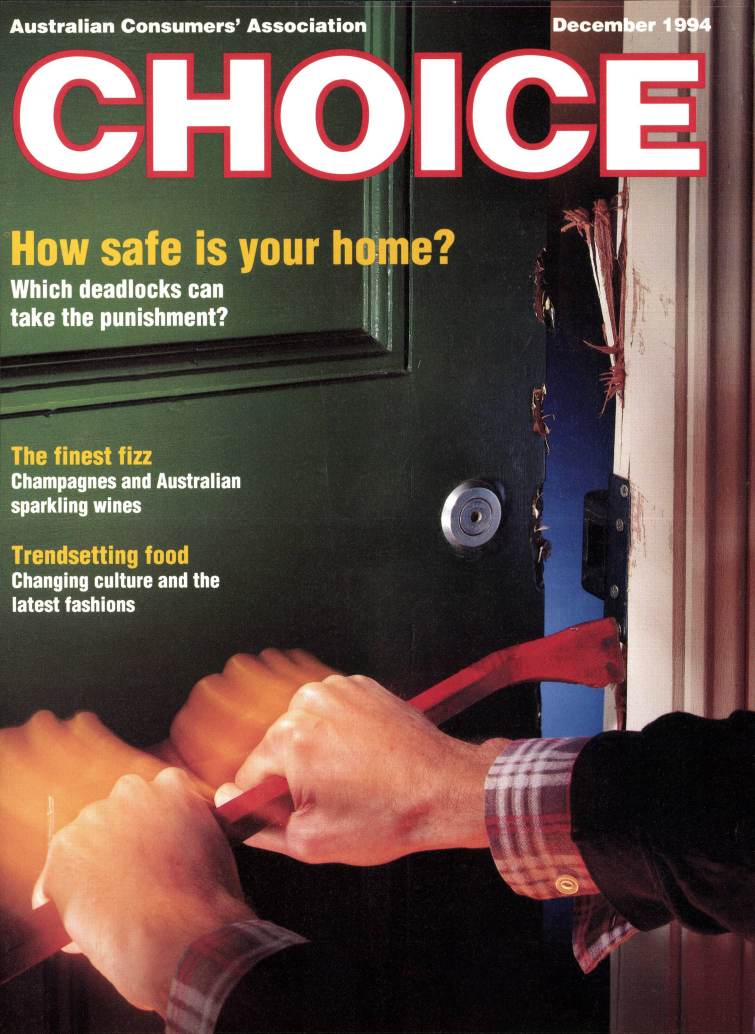
CHOICE

How safe is your home?

Which deadlocks can take the punishment?

The finest fizz
Champagnes and Australian sparkling wines

Trendsetting food
Changing culture and the latest fashions



Editorial

Through the Christmas season and the New Year, we become more conscious than usual of the process of renewal, with its promise of change and improvement.

At CHOICE we are especially looking forward to 1995 — it's the magazine's 35th birthday year. The first issue of CHOICE was published in April 1960, after the Consumers' Association itself was founded in August 1959. During the next year we will be undertaking a lot of exciting new projects to enlarge and improve the range of independent consumer advice and information we deliver to our subscribers and to the rest of the community.

A more specific type of renewal was raised with me recently in a letter which queried the fact that our subscribers receive a first reminder from us two months before their subscription is due to expire. This subscriber felt we were trying to get hold of his money too far in advance.

In fact, this early reminder is just part of our struggle to get renewals in by subscription lapse date; it's not uncommmon for 10 to 15% of renewals to come through after that. Some renewals come in months after they're due. It costs us a lot in postage and in manpower to administer our renewals program if three or four reminder notices are needed. With late renewals we have to send the magazine direct from our offices, rather than from the mailing house, and this again costs us time and money — money we'd rather spend on consumer research and supplying our customers with more and better information.

For these reasons we like subscribers to take out two-year subscriptions, or 'until further notice' subscriptions. To make this easier, from now on you'll be able to pay your automatic renewal by direct debit from your bank account. In the past, the only automatic payment method was by credit card.

Watch out for the new form with your next renewal notice. It saves you having to remember to renew and to post out a cheque. It saves us a lot of bothersome administration, and leaves us more time and resources for doing much more useful work.

I'd like to take this opportunity on behalf of the staff and the Council of the Consumers' Association to wish all our subscribers a safe, joy-filled and consumer-friendly Christmas. We look forward to sharing our 35th birthday with you in 1995.

Janice McEwen
Marketing manager

Who are we?

CHOICE EXISTS TO HELP YOU MAKE DECISIONS. It might be a question of which washing machine or fridge to buy, or which insurance policy or bank account to choose. It might be a case of giving you enough information about areas such as health, food and nutrition that you feel confident your decisions are based on sound knowledge. The reason you can rely on CHOICE is that the only interests we represent are yours — the consumer's.

We're not a government department or agency, and we get no ongoing funding from any government. Neither do we receive any subsidies from industry, manufacturers, unions or any other group, and we don't take any advertisements in the magazine. CHOICE survives purely because people like you subscribe to it: over 85% of our income is from CHOICE subscriptions, and the rest from sales of our Consumer Bookshelf and CHOICE Books, plus some special technical services such as testing appliances for their energy efficiency labelling. So we're independent in the true sense of the word: beholden to no-one but the consumers we represent and who keep CHOICE alive.

The organisation behind CHOICE is the Australian Consumers' Association. This does more than just publish CHOICE: we represent consumers' interests at federal and state government levels as a balance to the influence of manufacturers and service providers. You can become a voting member of the Consumers' Association as well as a CHOICE subscriber if you wish. The small extra membership fee you pay demonstrates your commitment to the rights of consumers, and gives you a subscription to a second magazine — either *Consuming Interest,* our publication covering broader consumer policy, or *CHOICE Travel.*

Around 70 people work at CHOICE in roles ranging from processing your subscriptions to testing the appliances, answering consumer queries, writing the articles in CHOICE and *Consuming Interest,* and representing consumer interests in the public arena. We're here because you think you need us, you trust us and are prepared to pay to keep us going.

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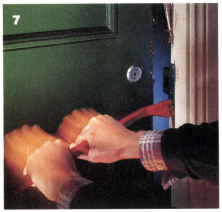

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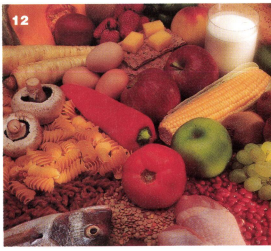
The number of Australians living in a unit is predicted to increase rapidly as governments and developers push the idea of medium-density housing. What do you know about the rules and regulations of life in a strata title building, and will bringing in a strata manager smooth the process?



Next issue

Portable stereo systems, insect repellents, 'sunscreen' fabrics, chipper/shredders, electric timers, care for the aged, 'green' credit card.

February, March, April

Tests: Video recorders, takeaway sandwiches, portable CD players, bread, sports drinks, 51 cm TVs, children's car restraints, dishwashers.
Surveys: Car reliability, car insurance, nutrient labelling on food, financial advisers, how green is your home?
Reports: Food storage; guide to wood; living with a disability; CDs: more than music; electromagnetic radiation; the 'new' meats — kangaroo, emu, crocodile, etc; lead: who is at risk?

Choice Tests

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Some locks will keep thieves at bay, while others will barely delay them. We found the best and the worst of the deadlocks on the market, and looked at how they work as part of a whole door 'system'.

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We asked a panel of experts to taste the current crop of French champagnes and Australian sparkling wines to help you choose your festive drop for Christmas.

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The products that came out best in our tests for the past year, to help you with your Christmas shopping and the January sales.

40 Composting and compost bins
Composting has become popular again, but many people don't know what makes good-quality compost. We outline the principles and test six bins designed to make it easier and to keep your garden looking tidy.

Child safety

NO SUCH YUK?

IT'S EVERY parent's nightmare. You turn your back for a few seconds and your toddler manages to find, open and eat or drink the contents of any container of medicine, methylated spirits or other toxic substance you might have in the house. It happens very quickly and it happens often. In a typical week, 50 children are admitted to hospitals throughout Australia because of accidental poisoning. These critical cases are only the tip of the iceberg: poisons information centres around the country field 1500 calls a week.

One attempt to reduce the likelihood of this household horror comes from an Adelaide company. Its 'Yuk!' labels are designed to be fixed to any and every hazardous substance in the home in an effort to communicate a dissuading 'don't touch' message to inquisitive children. According to a spokesperson for the company, they are also intended to alert parents to nasty products when they're dangerously within reach of small children. He added that they could also be useful for people of non-English-speaking backgrounds or anyone who had difficulty reading the fine print on labels.

It should be noted that critics of this type of product include people at the NSW Poisons Information Centre and the Child Safety Centre at the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children in Sydney. They told us they believed such stickers were useless because children of pre-literate age simply lack the ability to learn what they mean. This opinion is supported by one 1984 study of similar products in the US. It found some danger that children might even be attracted or have their curiosity aroused by the brightly coloured stickers.

This sits oddly with the fact that the products have received official endorsement by both the Australian Medical Association (AMA) and the Australian Nursing Federation. A spokesperson for the AMA told us the labels had been looked at by its Executive Council and thought to be a good public health initiative. However, its attention has recently been drawn to the above-mentioned overseas evidence and it is now planning to review its endorsement in the light of it. It is perhaps worth noting this study was only of children aged between 12 and 30 months and the sample was very small, casting some doubt over the statistical significance of the findings.

Both professional groups thought the labels might serve the purpose of raising public awareness of the poisoning problem and that if the labels saved even one child from poisoning they would be a worthwhile initiative, as long as there was no risk they actually endangered others. Both also said they would like to see further studies and research to establish with more certainty whether the labels work as intended and, if not, perhaps finding out what would.

Yuk! labels: do they give small children a 'don't touch' message, or arouse their curiosity?

If you're interested, Yuk! labels are available mainly through chemists'.

Of course, no one should rely on a sticker to protect children from dangerous substances. All groups in this field stress the vital importance of always keeping anything toxic in child-resistant containers and well out of reach of inquisitive children, preferably locked away.

Skating injuries

In-line skating: the first cut is the deepest?

WATCH YOUR FIRST STEP!

IF YOU'RE about to step out in a pair of in-line skates for the first time, consider this: most people who seriously injure themselves in this sport do so on their first outing.

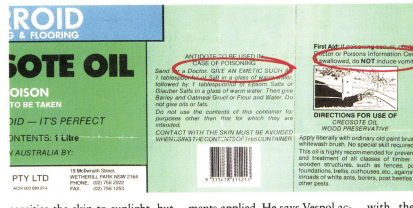
Research carried out by the Victorian Injury Surveillance System (VISS) and reported in its magazine *VISS HAZARD* gives valuable clues for avoiding injury while enjoying in-line skating.

Leaving aside cuts and bruises, the most common serious injuries were fractures of the forearm and wrist. These accounted for 75% of accidents where the injured person visited a hospital in the VISS reporting network. Ankle sprains were the next highest injury (15%) followed by leg (13%) and head injuries (11%). Injuries to the elbow were less frequent.

Who is at risk? Most of the cases (59%) involved 10 to 14-year-old children; the next most common age group was five to nine-year-olds. These figures probably reflect usage patterns, but young children are particularly at risk because they lack physical strength and co-ordination.

What should you do if you or your children want to take up this sport? Relatively few injuries occurred in playgrounds, parks and skating rinks, so it may be wise to start learning in a park or rink, not in traffic or near pedestrians. If you're only a beginner it pays to have someone with you to catch you when you start to fall. Wear a helmet and wrist protectors — the research clearly shows these are the most important pieces of safety gear. Knee and elbow guards also provide valuable protection. Skating rinks may have an instructor, so try and take a couple of lessons to set you off on the right foot.

LABELLING THAT MAKES YOU SICK


ROID
& FLOORING
SOTE OIL
OISON
TO BE TAKEN
OID — IT'S PERFECT
ONTENTS: 1 Litre
AUSTRALIA BY:
PTY LTD
ANTIDOTE TO BE USED IN CASE OF POISONING
Send for a Doctor. GIVE AN EMETIC SUCH AS
1 tablespoonful Salt in a glass of lukewarm water
followed by 1 tablespoonful of grated Salts or
Glacier Salts in a glass of warm water. Then give
Barley and Oatmeal Gruel or Flour and Water. Do
not give oils or fats.
Do not use the contents of this container for
purposes other than that for which they are
intended.
CONTACT WITH THE SKIN MUST BE AVOIDED
WHEN USING THE CONTENTS OF THIS CONTAINER
First Aid: If poisoning occurs, contact a
doctor or Poisons Information Centre.
If swallowed, do NOT induce vomiting.
DIRECTIONS FOR USE OF
CREOSOTE OIL
WOOD PRESERVATIVE
Apply liberally with ordinary old paint brush or
whitewash brush. No special skill required.
This oil is highly recommended for prevention
and treatment of all classes of timber and
wooden structures, such as fences, posts,
foundations, trellis, outhouses, etc., against the
inroads of white ants, borers, post beetles and
other pests.
19 Mcilwraith Street,
WETHERILL PARK NSW 2164
PHONE: (02) 756 2222
FAX: (02) 756 1253

Which of these two contradictory statements on the same label would you believe in an emergency? The answer's the one on the right — but how did this confusion happen?

WHEN dealing with poisons, quick first aid action can make all the difference. To this end the instructions on the container can provide invaluable safety information. But is this information always reliable and accurate? An example recently sent to us by G Prince of Mt Colah in NSW suggests not.

Mr Prince purchased a tin of PERROID creosote oil, a wood preservative, from a suburban hardware store, and was a little confused after reading the safety information. The first aid instructions on the label tell you that: "If swallowed, do NOT induce vomiting", while a section headed *Antidote to be used in case of poisoning* completely contradicts this. It suggests giving an emetic to induce vomiting, and even gives a recipe for one.

If there was an emergency and you came across someone who'd swallowed this product, which statement should you believe? In this case the correct action would be not to induce vomiting. Creosote is a corrosive substance and vomiting after swallowing it can increase blistering in the throat and make matters worse.

Contradictory first aid information is not the only labelling inadequacy, though. Creosote is a particularly unappetising substance, so swallowing it probably won't be the main danger. Perhaps of more concern is the total lack of directions for safe use of the product. This substance can cause burns, and repeated exposure may sensitise the skin to sunlight, but the label gives little in the way of safety instructions or information on what to do if you get it on your skin or in your eyes.

In Australia there are registration systems in place to control poisonous chemicals, and guidelines for the necessary safety information. Various state authorities have the job of ensuring dangerous chemicals conform to the relevant labelling requirements and that the information on the labels is correct. Recently a body called the National Registration Authority (NRA) was set up to co-ordinate chemical registration on a national level and it will eventually take over some of the states' responsibilities. So what went wrong in this case?

According to Mike Power, one of the directors of Vespol, which distributes PERROID creosote, the company was ignorant of the fact that registration was necessary and that special labelling requirements applied. He says Vespol acquired the creosote oil company about two years ago and simply continued marketing the product with the existing label. The only change there made was to put their own name on it. Incredible as it sounds, no-one at the time noticed the glaring contradiction in poisoning information or lack of safety directions.

The state authorities that police the registration system also deserve criticism. This product has been on sale with the offending label for at least two years. Why wasn't it picked up? According to Ron Eichner, Manager of Agricultural Registration at the NRA, the state authorities do send inspectors out to stores to check for unregistered products, but he admits resources are limited and some products do slip through the net.

Vespol has given us assurances that it will change the labelling on its creosote oil to come into line with the guidelines, and comply with the relevant registration needs. In the meantime it has had stickers made to go over the existing labels on stocks already in the shops.

While the response may solve the problem with this particular product, we can't help but feel uneasy that such a dangerous chemical was on hardware store shelves for so long with such woefully inadequate and inaccurate safety and first aid instructions, and that the company distributing it was ignorant of the requirements.

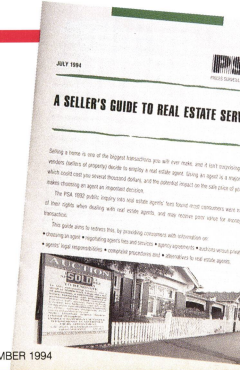
As this incident highlights, unregistered and poorly labelled products do find their way onto retailers' shelves. More work needs to be done by the authorities to educate manufacturers and distributors about their responsibilities and to police the registration system. Without this, consumers can have little confidence that first aid and safety information on products is reliable, accurate and complete.

SELLING YOUR HOME?

SELLING YOUR HOME can be a trying and emotionally draining time. To make sure you're not short-changed when dealing with real estate agents, you should ask yourself some questions before you embark on one of the most important transactions of your life.

Do you need a real estate agent? What services can you expect if you're engaging one? Which one should you choose? What should you know before you enter into an agreement? What's the difference between exclusive, sole, open and conjunctional agency agreements? How long is the standard period for an agency agreement? Can you negotiate the fee? Who gets the interest from your deposit? Will a private sale or a public auction get you a better deal for your house?

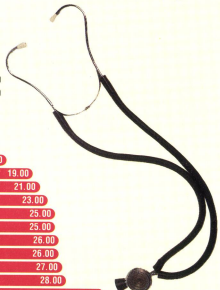
According to the Prices Surveillance Authority (PSA), most consumers aren't aware of their rights when dealing with real estate agents. Its recently published booklet *A Seller's Guide to Real Estate Services* goes some way to addressing questions like those above (also see *Selling your home* in CHOICE, June 1994). To get a copy of the booklet, phone the PSA toll-free on 1800 033 121, or pick one up at the PSA offices in Melbourne (Level 10, 10 Queens Road) or Sydney (Level 11, 5 Elizabeth Street).


JULY 1994
PSA
PRICES SURVEILLANCE AUTHORITY
A SELLER'S GUIDE TO REAL ESTATE SERVICES
Selling a home is one of the biggest transactions you will ever make, and it isn't surprising that most vendors (sellers of property) decide to employ a real estate agent. Using an agent is a major expense, which could cost you several thousand dollars, and the potential impact on the sale price of your house makes choosing an agent an important decision.
The PSA 1992 public inquiry into real estate agents' fees found most consumers were not aware of their rights when dealing with real estate agents, and may receive poor value for money in the transaction.
This guide aims to redress this, by providing consumers with information on:
• choosing an agent • negotiating agent's fees and services • agency agreements • auctions versus private sales
• agents' legal responsibilities • complaint procedures and • alternatives to real estate agents.
SOLD

SHOPPING AROUND

MEDICAL ATTENTION

Visit to doctor (after medical rebates)



Canada	Free
Fiji	Free
Italy	Free
Spain	Free
UK	Free
Australia	4.00
South Africa	4.00
Indonesia	6.00
South Korea	7.00
Zimbabwe	8.00
Singapore	10.00
Poland	12.00
Switzerland	19.00
Sweden	21.00
Belgium	23.00
France	25.00
Germany	25.00
Hong Kong	26.00
Netherlands	26.00
New Zealand	27.00
Ireland	28.00
Chile	38.00
Austria	51.00
USA	81.00
Israel	133.00

Wound dressing (eg Band-Aids per 24)

Chile	0.80
South Korea	1.20
Poland	1.30
Singapore	1.30
Indonesia	1.60
Israel	1.60
Australia	2.00
Fiji	2.00
Hong Kong	2.00
UK	2.00
Canada	2.20
South Africa	2.40
Spain	2.60
Italy	2.70
USA	2.70
New Zealand	2.80
Netherlands	3.00
Ireland	3.20
France	3.50
Sweden	3.50
Zimbabwe	3.60
Austria	3.90
Germany	5.10
Switzerland	5.60
Belgium	6.60

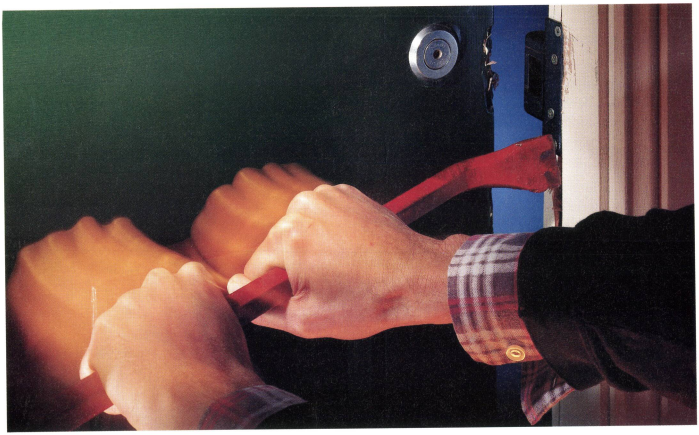
Headache tablets (per 24)

Zimbabwe	1.00
Chile	1.30
Fiji	1.50
South Africa	1.50
Singapore	1.90
Australia	2.30
Canada	2.30
Ireland	2.60
Sweden	2.70
New Zealand	2.80
Hong Kong	2.90
France	3.00
Spain	3.10
Indonesia	3.20
Israel	3.20
UK	3.20
USA	3.60
South Korea	3.90
Netherlands	4.80
Poland	5.00
Germany	5.10
Switzerland	5.70
Italy	5.90
Austria	6.20
Belgium	6.20

Antiseptic ointment (per 30g)

Poland	1.20
Spain	2.00
Belgium	2.10
Ireland	2.30
Australia	2.40
UK	2.40
Zimbabwe	2.60
Fiji	2.70
Singapore	2.80
South Africa	2.80
Sweden	3.00
Chile	3.20
New Zealand	3.30
USA	4.00
Hong Kong	4.60
Indonesia	4.70
Netherlands	5.00
South Korea	5.10
Canada	5.50
Austria	5.70
Germany	6.00
Italy	6.30
Finland	6.50
Israel	6.70
Switzerland	8.40

All prices in Australian dollars (to nearest 10 cents; nearest dollar for visit to doctor), based on exchange rates quoted in the *Australian Financial Review*, August 30, 1994.



BREAK, ENTER AND STEAL

Some locks will keep thieves at bay, while others will barely delay them. We tested exterior door locks and found a range of burglary deterrents from 'Fort Knox' to 'open invitation'. We also found the best lock in the world won't stop a thief from breaching many modern doors and door jambs.

BURGLARS ARE MAKING OFF with a lot of goods and money from Australian homes. The available information about how they come to be inside those homes in the first place points to good exterior door locks as an effective first line of defence. They can help make your place not worth a thief's trouble when easier pickings are to be had further up the street. Of course, other home security measures such as good relations with visible and alert neighbours, keyed window locks, bars, alarm systems, timer-activated lights and radios, and old stand-bys like the savage watchdog, will all make your place a far less attractive proposition too.

Some of the best research available on household break-ins is carried out by NRMA Insurance, one of the country's biggest household insurance companies. Its figures currently deal only with NSW and the ACT, but there seems no reason to think patterns of break-ins would differ greatly in other states, though obviously city dwellers are more at risk than those in rural areas. Of the 161 local government districts in NSW, for instance, the top 10 for highest rates of burglary are all in the Sydney metropolitan area.

What the figures show is enlightening. The NRMA estimated that last year burglars helped themselves to $370,000 worth of other people's property in NSW and the ACT *every day*, at the rate of one burglary every nine minutes. It expects these figures to rise. Doors and windows left open accounted for a healthy 9.4% of these unwelcome visitors, but in over half of the robberies in metropolitan areas, entry to the home was effected by forcing a door or window. Clearly, making that task more difficult will seriously hinder a lot of attempted burglaries, and good locks can do just that.

Those just about to head off for summer vacations may be comforted to know that, against the grain of one popular belief, only 2.5% of these burglaries occurred while the occupants were away on holiday. NRMA believes this shows people are more security-conscious when they are going away on a trip than when just going off to work or up to the shops, a perception perhaps supported by the astounding fact that in

a third of all robberies where the thief entered through an open door, that door was fitted with double-keyed deadlocks! Lesson one is that even the best lock will only protect your possessions if you remember to use it.

Getting inside your door

Anecdotal evidence from locksmiths and security specialists indicates very few modern housebreakers have the patience or skill to pick your locks. As one locksmith put it, if you're that good at the fine art of lock picking, why bother with a house or flat when you can as easily get into a shop or warehouse? Much of the thieving from residential properties these days seems to be the work of so-called 'amateurs', whose favoured methods are simple and effective: breaking in through doors or windows by the application either of a jemmy or a good swift kick.

Locksmiths also point out that these methods are even getting more effective, for a reason that is somewhat ironic. Despite the improving quality of many locks, they say, the quality of modern doors themselves and the jambs to which locks secure them is falling just as fast. They argue that locks should be seen as part of a system that includes good-quality windows, doors and jambs. Our test results (see the table on page 10) support this claim to some extent, showing up the typical door jamb as a weak point in this system.

Many doors fitted to modern homes are 'hollow core' — basically two sheets of plywood or other material on a frame, with nothing much in between. If you're serious about securing your home, solid-core or solid timber doors, at least 35 mm thick, along with high-quality jambs, are as important a starting point as the locks that go on them. We wanted to know how good the locks were, so we installed them on solid-core timber doors for our test. We strongly doubt whether a hollow-core door would have withstood the 'kicking' or jemmying we subjected ours to, regardless of what kind of lock was fitted.

What's available, what we tested

A **deadlock** is any lock that incorporates a **deadbolt**. This simply means a bolt which is not spring-activated, so when it's in the locked position it can't be pushed back. (Locks without deadbolts have traditionally been easy to open by slipping a screwdriver or credit card into the gap between door and jamb to slide back the bolt or latch.) **Deadlatches** come under this definition, since they too have a deadbolt — as an auxiliary to the sprung latchbolt — which, when activated, locks the latch in the extended position.

The essential difference between deadbolts and deadlatches is, as the names suggest, that one type has a bolt which must be seated in the strike on (or in) the door jamb by turning the key or knob (see Figure 1 below), while the latch type has a sprung latch so it can click shut without the key (see Figure 2).

We tested all the widely available deadlocks on the market at the time of testing. This encompassed **'cylinder rim' locks** and **tubular deadbolts**. Cylinder rim locks — which include deadlatches and deadbolts — are installed on the edge of the indoor surface of the door (the 'rim') and lock or latch into a **strike** — the metal fitting mounted next to them on the jamb. Tubular deadbolts are also fitted to the inside of the door, but work by sliding a bolt through a hole in the door's edge into a hole in the jamb (see Figure 3).

All the brands in our test come in **double-cylinder** varieties — with key-holes on both sides. Our market research showed these are by far the most popular — **single-cylinder** deadlocks can only be locked or unlocked from one side, making them unsuitable for exterior doors — so we tested double-cylinder models.

We left out certain other kinds of locks. Those known as **key-in-knob** locks (Figure 4) are frequently fitted to new houses, but they represent a very small share of the overall lock market as well as being next to useless. The knobs tend to be child's play to kick right off the door or tear off using a wrench or a similar heavy tool. If you only have one of these on your door, adding a decent security lock is highly advisable. This will bring the key-in-knob to the height of its usefulness: as a handle and/or latch to keep the door in place while you secure it with a real lock — a thing most deadlocks need anyway in order to operate them conveniently. With nothing by which to grip the door, you can find yourself trying to turn the lock while pulling on the key to hold the door in place; particularly difficult if it's a tight fit. Only one of the locks we tested — the **ABLOY 1310 Deadlock** — featured an external handle.

Mortice locks — so called because they are installed into a mortice or recess in the door's edge (Figure 5) — were not tested either because comparatively few are sold for ordinary domestic purposes. For sliding doors there are lockable sliding bolts (Figure 6), but these are closer to window locks than the exterior door locks in this test, so we didn't include them.

Features and flaws

Tubular deadbolts are strong locks because they feature a long bolt that inserts itself deep into the door jamb when it's fully extended. The problem with some of them is they undermine this quality by allowing to key to be removed before it is fully turned, leaving the bolt only par-

Figure 1. With a deadbolt you have to turn the key or a knob to secure the bolt in position. The best in our test was the Lockwood 3555CAO.

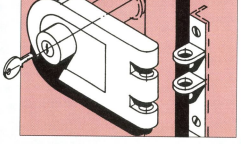


Figure 2. A deadlatch allows the door to click shut without the use of a key, but can also be locked into position like a deadbolt. The best in our test was the Lockwood 001CPAO.

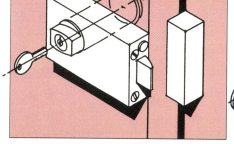
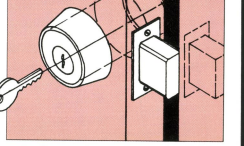


Figure 3. A tubular deadbolt has a bolt that passes through a hole in the door into a hole in the jamb. The best in our test was the Lockwood 007.



tially extended. Of those tested, only the LOCKWOOD models didn't have this problem. The SUPREME and WHITCO tubular deadbolts overcame the weakness by using a spring action that tended to push the bolt all the way out. If you're going to buy a lock of this type, first satisfy yourself you can't get the key out while the bolt is semi-extended. A partly extended bolt is less secure. The cylinder rim deadbolts we tested can't be semi-extended so they always work to their maximum effectiveness.

Deadlatches can use the key, a lever or a button to hold the latch retracted so the door won't lock if it swings shut. All those in our test let you enable or disable the knob on the inside, so if you're home you won't need a key to get out (see *Danger! Don't let your deadlock be the death of you* on page 10). If you're going out, you can disable the knob to stop a thief who entered by a window or skylight from carrying your possessions out the front door. Some deadbolts with an internal knob also have this facility.

Our test

We used solid-core doors to put locks to the test and selected good-quality softwood jambs, as that is the most typical door jamb material in modern homes. We had the locks installed by a carpenter, since even though many of them won't challenge the more expert do-it-yourself handyperson, one security specialist told us he estimated half the door locks he sees are incorrectly fitted.

We then subjected the whole door/lock/jamb system to our test rig, which was designed to simulate kicking by administering blows ranging from fairly gentle thumps right up to 'kicking the living daylights out of them'. The locks were subjected to five 'kicks' at each level of force, to a maximum of 55 in total.

After that, we fitted another of each lock and attacked the doors with a 640 mm jemmy, timing how long it took our tester to get them open.

The locks were rated according to the number of kicks of increasing ferocity they withstood and the time taken to breach them with the jemmy. Those intact after five and half minutes of jemmying were considered to have withstood enough, since we doubt many burglars would persevere with such attention-getting activity much longer than this.

What we found

We gave the locks in this test a fairly torrid time because that's exactly what a would-be thief is likely to do to yours. It was much tougher than the test specified in the Australian Standard for these products. The majority of them couldn't cope with the punishment we gave them and, sooner or later, yielded to allow walk-in access. You can see how they stood up to it in the table.

It may be that some of the locks that came through our test with only fair results could still withstand an assault by a thief of average size and strength, but why count on it being David who tries to rob you when you can get a lock that will beat Goliath?

One highly noticeable result of our testing was that a large proportion of the failures occurred when the door jamb shattered, rather than the lock itself breaking. This was frequently because the jambs were weakened at the points where the strike was screwed in.

The best locks in our test easily overcame this problem by good design. The strike fitting of the LOCKWOOD 007 tubular deadbolt, for instance, features a sturdy and well-machined metal box that inserts into the door jamb to spread impact forces and greatly reinforce the wood, rather than a simple metal plate attached to the jamb's surface. The method by which the strikes of the top-performing locks are screwed into the jamb, and the size, number and construction of the screws themselves, also augment the strength of the overall system.

As for how the different types of lock fared, it was noted that most of the deadlatch types gave up the ghost after relatively little cracking of the jamb.

All the timber used for our door jambs was from the same batch and, though softwood, was above-average quality. To test the extent to which jambs might be regarded as the weak point in the system, we decided to retest some of the poorest-performing locks using timber of far higher density and strength: much more like hardwood than typical softwood. Not surprisingly, this resulted in some improvement in their performance as the jambs resisted splintering for longer. In no case, however, did this improvement lift a lock's performance rating from 'poor' to better than 'fair'. The jambs or locks still broke relatively early in the ordeal.

To check this theory further, we refitted the best performer — the LOCKWOOD 355SCAO — using a jamb made of timber deliberately selected as inferior to that used in the original test. It still came through with flying colours, proving virtually 'unkickable' and putting its design credentials beyond doubt.

All this extra trouble allows us to say with certainty that high-quality jambs, especially hardwood or steel, will make a significant contribution to the security of your exterior doors no matter which lock you have, and can lift the performance of even poor locks somewhat. If you're not building from scratch or aren't prepared to tear out and replace your door jambs, however, you can buy an excellent lock that will effectively

Figure 4. A key-in-knob lock can easily be kicked or forced off the door.

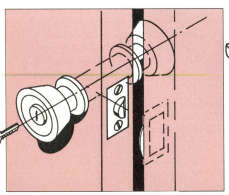


Figure 5. A mortice lock is installed into a mortice or recess in the door's edge.

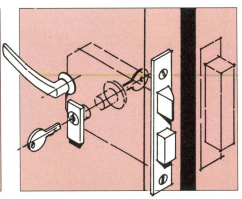
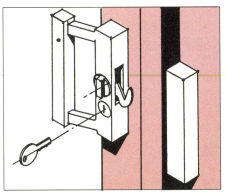


Figure 6. You can get lockable sliding bolts for sliding doors.



Exterior door locks

1

	Brand/model (in rank order)	Type	Manufacturer/ distributor	Origin	Target price ($) *	Warranty
	LOCKWOOD 355SCAO Deadlock	Cylinder rim deadbolt	Ogden	Australia	95	✓ *(C)*
equal	**LOCKWOOD** 007 Deadbolt	Tubular deadbolt	Ogden	Australia	115	✓ *(C)*
	LOCKWOOD 001CPAO Automatic Deadlatch	Cylinder rim deadlatch	Ogden	Australia	70	✓ *(C)*
	LOCKWOOD 777 Deadbolt	Tubular deadbolt	Ogden	Australia	70	✓ *(C)*
	KWIKSET 665 Deadlock	Tubular deadbolt	Black & Decker	US	50	✓ *(D)*
equal	**LANE** P506 Thief Resistant Deadlock	Cylinder rim deadbolt	Black & Decker	China	40	
	LANE PLB761 Double Cylinder Deadlock	Tubular deadbolt	Black & Decker	Taiwan	50	
	SUPREME 262 N187179 Dead Lock *(A)*	Tubular deadbolt	Mitre 10	Taiwan	—	
equal	**WHITCO** 700-605 Double Deadlatch	Cylinder rim deadlatch	Whitco	Australia	80	✓ *(E)*
	WHITCO 720-102 Deadbolt	Tubular deadbolt	Whitco	Taiwan	50	✓ *(E)*
	ABLOY 1310 Deadlock *(B)*	Cylinder rim deadlatch	Abloy	Finland	90	
	ANNITE Double Cylinder Deadbolt	Tubular deadbolt	Security Hardware	Taiwan	40	
equal	**BOYD** B162P Reversible Double Cylinder High Security Deadbolt	Tubular deadbolt	Boyd	Australia	70	
	GAINSBOROUGH 850 SS 60 S Deadbolt	Tubular deadbolt	Peter Eldring	Spain	45	✓ *(F)*
	TRADELINE KA270 Dead Bolt	Tubular deadbolt	Arlec	China	25	

* Prices are a good target to aim at based on nationwide checks in September 1994.

(A) Has been discontinued but we have included it in our table for the benefit of readers who already have one.
(B) Has been discontinued, though stock may still be available in some shops.
(C) Unconditional on parts and workmanship for the normal working life of the lock.
(D) 10 years for mechanical defects.
(E) One year unconditional on materials and workmanship.
(F) One year free from defects.
(G) Has a sprung mechanism to extend bolt.

counteract this potential weak spot in the door security system, within reason.

There are products on the market in some states that reinforce door jambs by means of a steel plate running down their entire length. Such an accessory would almost certainly strengthen resistance to kicking and jemmying and probably improve the performance of most deadlocks. Check with your local hardware outlet or locksmith to find out about availability in your area, though bear in mind that fitting such a product could mean removing and planing the door to allow space for the metal sleeve.

WHAT TO BUY

Three locks took everything we dished out to them and came up trumps — all from the house of LOCKWOOD.

LOCKWOOD 355SCAO Deadlock	$95
LOCKWOOD 007 Deadbolt	$115
LOCKWOOD 001CPAO Automatic Deadlatch	$70

■ Of the **tubular deadbolts**, only the LOCKWOOD 007 went the complete distance of 55 'kicks' and, although damaged, still prevented entry.

■ If you prefer the features of a **deadlatch** (see *Features and flaws* on page 8), the LOCKWOOD 001CPAO took 51 kicks, including one at maximum force: enough to gain it an 'excellent' rating. It was still a barrier to entry right up until that point, though it was damaged beyond proper operation quite a bit earlier than this.

■ Among **cylinder rim deadbolts** the outstanding lock — and the star performer of all locks tested — was the LOCKWOOD 355SCAO. It not only came through everything we did to it without the faintest hint of allowing unauthorised entry, it did so with no sign of damage to either lock or jamb and was still in perfect working order at the end of this long and savage battering: an extraordinary achievement.

All three of these locks also proved 'unjemmiable' within our five and a half minute time limit. Depending on your preference for type, choose one from the *What to buy* list.

DANGER! DON'T LET YOUR DEADLOCK BE THE DEATH OF YOU

DEADLOCKS AND OTHER SECURITY MEASURES such as keyed window locks and bars have a tragic record of being implicated in deaths and injuries from fires. If your doors are deadlocked and a fire breaks out, it is vital to have the key close to hand. We strongly recommend always keeping the key **in the lock** (on the inside, of course!) especially during the night.

Tubular deadbolts can generally only be opened using the key, whether from inside or out. It is vital to keep the keys handy: either in the lock or hanging nearby. Similarly, all the deadlatches in our test allow you to disable the inside knob using the key: great for hindering a thief trying to escape with your television, but these locks should never be left with their internal knobs inoperative when there are people at home.

A spokesperson for the NSW Fire Brigade's Fire Investigation Unit said he was aware of many cases of death and injury caused by bars and locks preventing exit during a fire. He pointed out that the majority of house fires break out in the kitchen or lounge room, and in many houses people must pass through these rooms from bedrooms to reach exit doors. In a case like this, you don't have time to spend looking for keys. The same advice applies to window locks: unlock them or keep the keys near them when you're at home.

The Fire Brigade spokesperson recommended always unlocking all deadlatches as soon as you enter the house or, with deadbolts that are either locked or open, making sure the key is in the lock. He said fire authorities also strongly recommend installing smoke detectors, available for around $10. These can give you a potentially lifesaving head start, allowing you either to put out a fire before it gets out of control or at least locate your deadlock key and make good your escape.

ures full agement? adbolts only)	3 Kick test rating	4 Jemmy test rating	Brand/model (in rank order)	
	Excellent	Excellent	**LOCKWOOD** 355SCAO Deadlock	
	Excellent	Excellent	**LOCKWOOD** 007 Deadbolt	equal
applicable	Excellent	Excellent	**LOCKWOOD** 001CPAO Automatic Deadlatch	
	Good	Fair	**LOCKWOOD** 777 Deadbolt	
	Good	Poor	**KWIKSET** 665 Deadlock	
	Fair	Fair	**LANE** P506 Thief Resistant Deadlock	equal
	Good	Poor	**LANE** PLB761 Double Cylinder Deadlock	
	Fair	Poor	**SUPREME** 262 N187179 Dead Lock *(A)*	
applicable	Poor	Poor	**WHITCO** 700-605 Double Deadlatch	equal
	Poor	Poor	**WHITCO** 720-102 Deadbolt	
applicable	Poor	Bad	**ABLOY** 1310 Deadlock *(B)*	
	Poor	Bad	**ANNITE** Double Cylinder Deadbolt	
	Poor	Bad	**BOYD** B162P Reversible Double Cylinder High Security Deadbolt	equal
	Poor	Bad	**GAINSBOROUGH** 850 SS 60 S Deadbolt	
	Poor	Bad	**TRADELINE** KA270 Dead Bolt	

1 Type
See *What's available, what we tested* on page 8 for a description and illustrations of the different types.

2 Ensures full engagement?
Being able to withdraw the key before the bolt is fully engaged is a problem, since a partially extended bolt is less secure. The best deadbolts won't let you. See *Features and flaws* on page 8 for more on this.

3 Kick test rating
The locks were rated according to the number of 'kicks' of increasing force they withstood on a five-level scale: bad, poor, fair, good and excellent.

4 Jemmy test rating
This rating is according to how long it took us to jemmy the door open, on a five-level scale: bad, poor, fair, good and excellent. We gave up trying on any lock still intact after five and half minutes.

DO IT YOURSELF?

OF ALL THE DEADLOCKS TESTED, the tubular deadbolts required the most carpentry skill to install. That's because they need precisely aligned and drilled holes through the front and back surfaces of the door and another through the side edge to meet up with the lock mechanism and align closely with a fourth in the jamb that forms the housing for the extended bolt (see Figure 3 on page 8).

One of the best performers, the **LOCKWOOD 007 Deadbolt**, was a particularly challenging installation task, with the bolt offset from the main body of the lock. Our carpenter was heard to describe it as "the mother of all locks to install", though he also said it shouldn't be impossible for the home handyperson if the instructions were followed religiously.

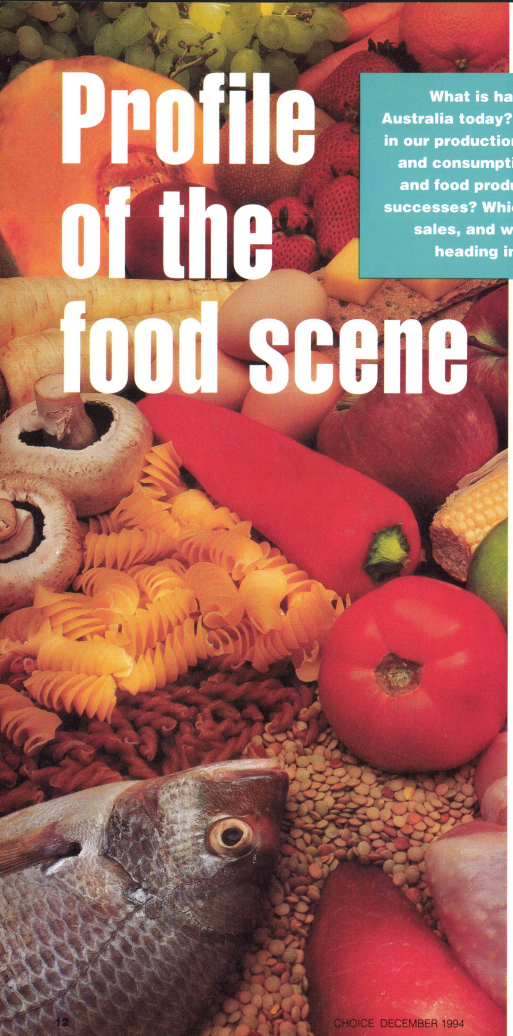
The fitting of strikes so that doors shut neatly and tightly can be a finicky job requiring some skill, especially on locks with morticed strikes which require a recess to be chiselled precisely enough to allow no play in the bolt or door.

Again, we were warned by one security specialist that many locks are incorrectly installed, greatly undermining their effectiveness. Messing this job up could leave you with a weakened — or even ruined — door or jamb, so if you're not completely confident of your carpentry skills, get professional help.

Our tests: 'kicking' the door with precisely measured increasing degrees of force ...

... and using a jemmy.

Profile of the food scene



What is happening with food in Australia today? What trends are being set in our production, purchasing, preparation and consumption of food? Which foods and food products have been runaway successes? Which have had disappointing sales, and why? And where are we heading in the coming years?

AUSTRALIANS, IT SEEMS, HAVE A surprisingly high level of interest in food — at least judging by its prominence in the media and publishing. We may not be the cultural and social gourmets of the western world — that claim was snaffled long ago by France and Italy — but we do devote more printed space per capita to the topic of food than any other developed country.

We have quite phenomenal sales of cookbooks, for example. The *Australian Women's Weekly* cookbook series, launched in 1976, now boasts 56 different titles, eleven of which have sold over one million copies. We also enjoy an unusually large variety of food magazines, and there are at least three new ones currently in the works. Our mainstream magazines and newspapers dedicate generous amounts of expensive space to food articles.

Australians also enjoy watching food being prepared and discussed on television: the number and range of food shows is growing fast, on both the 'serious' and 'mainstream' broadcasters. These include *Consuming Passions* (ABC), *Roving Gourmet* and *Anne's Kitchen* (SBS), and *What's Cooking* (Channel 9). Virtually all our daytime chat shows include a food segment (*Good Morning Australia*, *Today Show*, *Midday Show*, *At Home*).

Only radio has not been quite as quick to jump on the food bandwagon in Australia. This is probably because one of the dimensions of food people most appreciate is its visual richness, and obviously radio is a medium which cannot offer this. However, Alan Saunders' food program, broadcast twice weekly on Radio National, does set a trend other radio outlets could follow.

What shapes our food: trends and influences

Mediterranean stock and Asian saucery

Two very powerful recent influences on food in Australia have their origins in our immigration program. Our first wave of migration in the second half of this century introduced the Mediterranean influence: olive oil, oregano, pasta, fresh tomato sauces, focaccia, pizza, prosciutto, goat's cheese and so on. The second wave brought the Asian influence, which has made soy, oyster, black bean and nam pla (fish) sauces, noodles, Chinese vegetables, chillis and sesame oil into mainstream supermarket items and food choices.

Elise Pascoe, food writer, cook and so-called "passionate poet" on the topic of food in Australia, believes the Mediterranean influence will always retain its hold on Australian consumers. It has been responsible for fostering our national love of food and introducing self-service greengrocers, and is particularly appropriate for our sun-drenched climate. She perceives that from Asian cuisine we have particularly latched onto the condiments and sauces: therefore we buy and eat dishes whose nature is fundamentally Mediterranean, but whose flavour is often touched by Asia.

Australian women at work

Given our fondness for reading about food, it is not surprising that social researcher Hugh Mackay's most recent snapshot-in-time of Australians, *Reinventing Australia*, includes a significant amount of commentary on changes in our society relevant to food.

Women have traditionally been the 'gatekeepers' in relation to food: it has been, and often still remains, their role to select and buy whatever food enters a household. As a result, the bulk of food manufacturers' and processors' sales efforts have been directed at women.

Mackay homes in on "one of the most significant socio-cultural changes of the last 50 years" (and consequently also in the supermarket). He identifies "the emergence of the working mother as a mainstream phenomenon" as responsible in large part for redefining the Australian family and household, and the way we shop and eat.

The formal meal and mealtime are, for many people, a thing of the past: we now 'graze' and snack, as the boom in snack food products shows. Australian households distinguish themselves by being the fourth-largest consumers of snack foods in the world.

Also fading fast are the days of labour-intensive home preparation of fresh food to be served on the spot. Barbara Northwood, Food Editor of *Woman's Day*, says, "Hands-on cooking is dead. In another 10 years we'll have to tell people how to peel an onion."

Sue Fairlie-Cunninghame, Executive Director, Food and Wine, at *Vogue Entertaining*, reveals that while the magazine's staff knows a lot about the ingredients that go into the huge variety of dishes they come across in their work and in restaurants, they may well not know how use them all in cooking. Pamela Clark, Food Editor of *Australian Women's Weekly*, relates how her teenage son's friends regarded him as "a freak of nature" when he was revealed to be the only one among his peers who could put together a meal (pasta).

To the extent that Australians still do cook at home, many opt for 'do ahead' recipes that can be frozen and do not involve many ingredients: "Any more than six to a recipe, and people won't read it," categorically states Barbara Northwood, based on her experience at *Woman's Day*. This trend towards cooking that is narrower in scope and simpler in concept is even echoed at the gourmet end of the market. Elise Pascoe describes Australian cooking now as "short on ingredients, with no more than three elements (such as crust, sauce, pie contents), practical, and not too dextrously demanding."

Not only simplicity but speed is the name of the game, as far as the combined circulation and readership of *Women's Weekly* and *Woman's Day* (estimated at around 2.3 million Australians in September 1993) are concerned. Sue Fairlie-Cunninghame agrees: "Australians now want meals that take less than 40 minutes to make it onto the table from the time they walk in the door."

Guilt and anxiety

However, it seems that the very working women who have wrought such major changes in our relationship with food have some concerns and misgivings about the directions they are taking — and food manufacturers have, quite logically, hastened to zero in on these. Hugh Mackay talks of such women's desire to "prove that the family is not suffering from having a working mother", and how this affects their food choices.

'Now food' (or 'do it for me' food): Franklins Big Fresh fruit and vegetables are all cut up and ready to go. According to food followers, supermarkets are "beside themselves" at the potential success of this new trend.

Barbara Northwood talks of anxiety and guilt, and believes this explains the success of simmer sauces and value-added side dishes (versions of potatoes and rice, for example). Products such as Chicken Tonight, which cater to the food provider's desire to still 'do their bit' in putting together the meal, but also make it easy and fast, are sure-fire winners and have shown very strong growth over the past couple of years.

Other demands coming through quite clearly from working women (in fact from food consumers in general) include quality but value for money; and health in food.

Brian Beattie, managing director of Coles Supermarkets, was quoted in the weekly food and drinks industry magazine *Foodweek* discussing the "new breed of smart shoppers" which has emerged in Australia in the wake of the recession, looking for "premium-quality products" but "more value-conscious than ever".

The nutritional value of food, and making food choices which can encourage better health, have become concerns for almost all Australian consumers. A survey conducted in Australia on consumer attitudes and the supermarket in 1992 (*Trends in Australia*) shows that 90% of respondents were concerned about the nutritional content of the food they eat. The Australian Food Survey carried out by the CSIRO for Edgell Birds Eye found that two out of three people said they were more concerned about nutrition when buying food than price or convenience.

Trends in Australia also revealed up to 40% of food shopping is now done by men. Some of these shoppers were buying food for themselves, whereas others would be shopping for a family. Unfortunately the survey doesn't give any information about the extent to which the latter are actually making the food choices for the family. This will be an interesting issue to follow up in the future.

The quest for fresh

Running parallel with the demand for fast and easy food is another trend, most simply summed up in the catchphrase quoted by *Foodweek*, "The quest for fresh". It is difficult to assess which trend is the stronger and, indeed, whether they are contradictory.

Cynics might argue that the fresh food craze has its origins in 'foodie' ranks only, and is the exclusive preserve of moneyed gourmets. When Elise Pascoe rhapsodises about the "fresh, peak of season, healthy, light" approach that she believes characterises Australian food choices and which will make us "the talk of the gastronomic world at the Olympics", it is hard to believe she is talking about the same consumers who have rushed to embrace the delights of products such as Green's Potato & Sauce (see page 17).

And yet this seems to be the case. Consumers in Australia today quite comfortably straddle both trends, and select from the proliferating ranges of processed and fresh foods as suits their requirements and budget at the time.

'Do it for me' food

Increasingly Australians are opting not to prepare their own food. We now eat out or choose from a vast array of take-away and convenience foods, which run the gamut from minimally part-prepared to fully ready-to-eat.

Industry observer Phil Ruthven of Ibis Business Information draws the distinction between what he terms DIFM (do it for me) and DIY (do it yourself) food. He predicts that over the next 10 years, over 50% of the money spent on food by Australians will be of the DIFM type. According to his predictions, in 1993-1994 we will have spent 40% of our food dollars on varieties of DIFM food (fast, restaurant or other served-to-you food).

At the minimally part-prepared end of the spectrum, it is revealing that the term 'convenience' foods now no longer refers only to processed products. Significant growth is being charted in the new 'convenience fresh' foods market, such as 'value-added' meat short-cuts (like stir-fries and marinated kebabs). Another example is fruit and vegetables which are prepacked, portion-controlled, uniform in size and colour. This

IN THE DELICATESSEN

Supermarkets haven't been slow to keep up with new tastes and expectations in deli foods.

Until 10 years ago, the typical Australian delicatessen survived almost solely on the sale of smallgoods: devon, chicken, ham and corned beef. Those with a 'continental' orientation daringly offered olives and salami.

In 1994 most delicatessens, including those within the supermarket chains, have been totally transformed. They now stock a huge array of foods.

The cold cuts are still there, but have significantly expanded, evidence of the Mediterranean influence hard at work: pancetta, coppa, lots of different types of prosciutto and salami. Other foods in the antipasto range are taking pride of place: sun-dried tomatoes, marinated capsicum, many varieties of olive. The range of cheeses has also increased dramatically.

Frank Romeo, Manager of the Neutral Bay Food Hall in Sydney, has seen phenomenal changes in delicatessen life over just the five years he has been in business. He seconds Mark Rusbatch's (General Manager, Franklins Big Fresh) vote for 'now food' (or 'do it for me' food — see above), and points to the ever-increasing demand in delicatessens for prepared meals. Many delis are Italian-based, selling traditional Italian-style pre-prepared pasta, veal, chicken and stuffed vegetable dishes, but deli owners also acknowledge the rise of Thai, Japanese and Mexican cuisine choices.

follows the lead set by retailers such as Marks and Spencer and Sainsbury in the United Kingdom, where 90% of all fresh produce is 'convenience'.

The potatoes promoted earlier this year to Pamela Clark at *Australian Women's Weekly* were a signal of the arrival of this trend in Australia: "This was a tray of six perfect, matched-for-size potatoes which you could just take home and slide into the microwave. The retailers are apparently beside themselves, they reckon it will be such a good seller."

At the fully ready-to-eat end of the spectrum there is a burgeoning number of items in supermarkets and delicatessens such as lasagne, quiche and other 'heat and eat' fresh products — and let's not forget the success of supermarket self-serve salad bars. Bruce Bevan of the Australian Supermarket Institute (ASI) comments on how these may not have met with a warm reception from food inspectors concerned with hygiene and food safety, but "the customers think they're terrific".

Mark Rusbatch, General Manager for Franklins Big Fresh, forecasts enormous continued growth in what he terms the 'now food' market (namely, 'do it for me' ready-to-eat fresh food). Big Fresh is making its name with 'now food', and Rusbatch believes this is because 'now food' combines both the fresh and convenience trends (for more on Big Fresh, see *In the supermarket*, right).

How the trends translate

In the supermarket

Compared to many other developed countries, food retailing in Australia is centralised and concentrated both in ownership and in size and location of stores where most food shopping is done. This means the major supermarket chains are easily the best places to examine how the food trends are being translated into products.

Market leader Woolworths (around 32% market share in mid 1994 according to *Foodweek*) has definitely chosen to hitch its star to fresh, with its 'fresh food people' image. Fresh foods now account for over 50% of items stocked in Woolworths, and considerably more if you include dairy products in the fresh category.

According to John Brunton, Woolworths' General Manager for Supermarkets, in the 1980s research started to highlight consumer interest in healthy eating, and revealed that people would choose their supermarket based on how much confidence they had in its fresh foods. Making the name Woolworths synonymous with fresh has meant a large investment in retraining all staff in selection, handling, display and storage of foods, but it has paid off. Woolworths anticipates continued growth in fresh foods, and has developed a new store design to emphasise its fresh food offerings.

Franklins (around 15% market share in mid 1994) has chosen to go fresh but also big, with the introduction of its 'marketstores'. We visited the first 'Big Fresh', which opened in Leichhardt, Sydney, in 1992. It was definitely an Alice in Freshfoodwonderland experience.

As you enter the store, you are greeted by a cheery parade of giant bananas and carrots and the like, which overlooks displays of every type of fruit and vegetable imaginable (the store runs 500 different lines). Throughout the store are carefully littered remnants of the farming life: ploughshares, saddles, cart wheels. Music and video are playing. It is clear this sort of food shopping is meant to be an enjoyable, multi-media leisure outing for everyone, including the children.

The variety of fresh food presented is mind-boggling — far more than just fruit and vegetables. No sooner do you escape from the fresh noodle bar than you stumble into the freshly squeezed juices bar, fresh salad bar, fresh herbs stand, and fresh seafood, meat, pasta and more sections. The presentation in Big Fresh is unquestionably impressive:

EATING OUT

The percentage of the weekly food budget in Australia devoted to eating out is increasing rapidly. Whereas in 1975-76 it was only 18.1%, by 1988-89 it had risen to 24.5%. By 1995 it is predicted to climb still further to 30%.

Some of the most interesting developments in eating out in Australia are taking place in the fast food chains. The big three (McDonald's, KFC and Pizza Hut) have all diversified their methods of food delivery. For example, McDonald's now offers sit-down, take-away and drive-through; Pizza Hut has sit-down, take-away and home delivery. Just how popular this type of home delivery has become can be judged by Pizza Hut's claim than about 50% of its business is generated this way.

An enormously successful new contender in the eating out scene is the 'concept' restaurant, provided by chains such as Sizzler and Keg. In *Reinventing Australia,* social researcher Hugh Mackay identifies this as a "significant signpost to future development".

Mackay argues that traditionally Australian family eating has been very private (Sunday roasts, home barbecues). Now Australian families no longer regularly share traditional meals, we are witnessing the introduction of "community dining rooms" such as Sizzler restaurants. Mackay believes these will become increasingly common, because they are designed to offer an environment where the family can sit down and talk while its members share a meal that comes close to the standard and style of home cooking. In this context it is interesting to observe changes in the Pizza Hut chain — originally a fast food merchant — as it attempts a rebirth as a concept restaurant chain.

Sizzler: part of the trend to 'community dining rooms' as families find new ways of eating together.

it is just a tad offputting to think that it is the demand for fresh that has led to this level of artifice in food shopping.

If you can make it through all this sensory overload, at the end you emerge into the traditional grocery market arrangement of dry goods on shelves — albeit with aisles the width of a garage (all the better to cram more consumers into!).

Woolworths' rival, Coles (24% market share in mid 1994), appears to have sidestepped making a big issue out of fresh (no doubt due to the overkill the competition is giving it). Coles' strategies have focused instead on meeting consumer demand for quality with value for money, and health in food.

Coles has relaunched its Farmland house brand range as "Australia's only premium private label". The brand currently houses 720 products, and many more are planned for release over the coming months. This may be an astute move from Coles, given that Bruce Bevan of the Australian Supermarket Institute forecasts that over the coming years, other house brands will also attempt more of a quality image and see strong growth.

Coles is also building its 'health' business, with the installation of 'health food' sections in the majority of its stores. These are stand-alone sections which offer vitamins, 'health foods', snacks and a number of grocery lines (as well as non-food items such as beauty products). Coles has also made public its intention to consider a 'health foods' house brand.

In food manufacturing and processing

It is never easy to be sure whether Australian consumers are the drivers or the passengers of the food industry bus, but it is clear manufacturers and processors have been responding to rather than driving some of the trends discussed earlier in this article.

We haven't been able to obtain any statistics which reveal the number of new food products coming onto the market in Australia. Data from the US talks about 5000 new products appearing in a given year, out of a total supermarket cache of up to 40,000. The numbers are undoubtedly smaller in Australia, given that the average supermarket here stocks between 15,000 and 25,000 items. However, Barbara Northwood of *Woman's Day* (who is exposed to a great many of the new products) swears she has never seen so many as in the past year.

A skim through six months' worth (January to June 1994) of the weekly *Foodweek* magazine yields a fairly representative picture of the directions most of the new food products are taking.

There is increasing discussion of expanding varieties of fresh products: fresh pasta, complete vegetable prepacked meals, premium fresh juices, and ready-to-eat, washed salad mixes.

The health interest is probably the one which appears to have been picked up on the most widely. It has been translated into an incredible range of variations on the theme.

"Hands-on cooking is dead. In another ten years we'll have to tell people how to peel an onion."

For example, coming out of the gym closet and into the mainstream are sports drinks. Gatorade is now the market leader (launched in 1993) but Lucozade, Isosport Edge, Isostar, Sportplus and others are hot on its heels. Millions are being spent on promoting sports drinks in Australia. They are not only available in supermarkets but also in convenience stores and milk bars. We'll be looking at whether they're any more effective than drinking water in an issue of CHOICE next year.

Snack and 'functional' foods

A small Queensland company has been hard at work developing what it hopes will be Australia's 'premier nutritious snack', picking up on our liking for snack foods and our interest in health at the same time. This is a roasted chick pea product known as Chic Nuts, which is hoped to have particular appeal to women because it is claimed to be low in fat.

Other snack foods are also in the process of being made over in the health image. This sort of creativity is obviously highly regarded internally among members of the food industry fraternity, as reports on the *Foodweek* awards in 1994 reveal. One of the finalists for the Better Health Innovation award (jointly sponsored by *Foodweek* and NSW Health) was Koala Pop Korn, claimed to be a low-fat, high-fibre popcorn processed using canola oil and "all natural flavours". The winning product, however, was a hotdog known as The Dogfather: not only "94% fat-free", but also a complete hotdog system with steamer container for the dogs and heat spikes for the breadrolls (aimed at school canteens).

Australian Co-operative Foods' Ski DoubleUp received the Best New Product award. DoubleUp is marketed not only as a 'healthy snack' but as appropriate for any time of the day (see right for more). The product is one of the many which have contributed to the marked expansion of the dairy cabinet in recent times.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from snack foods supposedly reincarnated as health foods, 'functional foods' are cautiously edging their way into the Australian market. These are food products specifically designed to have a positive health impact, such as the fermented health drink Yakult launched this year. A blend of skim milk, sugar, water and a strain of bacteria claimed to help the intestine function at peak efficiency, Yakult is selling strongly.

Just how quickly this category of new products grows will largely depend on how successful manufacturers are with their encouragement to the National Food Authority to lift its current prohibition on health claims on labels. Functional foods cannot be adequately marketed without health claims — and we are concerned that it's almost impossible to have health claims which don't mislead people. For example, if health claims were permitted, a high-fat product might have a label stating: "This product is cholesterol-free and can contribute to the prevention of heart disease". Consumers may well buy it on the basis of this claim, not realising that for the majority of people the type and amount of fat in the product are more relevant to prevention of heart disease than dietary cholesterol.

The three fastest growth predictions given by *Foodweek* in January for 1994 were, in order, dairy desserts, chilled fresh pasta, and all fresh categories. Some of the others were quality convenience meals, take-away foods, sports drinks, Mexican and Indian foods, bottled sauces and value-added potatoes.

SKI DOUBLEUP

Australian Co-operative Foods' Ski DoubleUp was named Best New Product for 1993-94 in the *Foodweek* awards.

The company is no stranger to such success: its Farmers' Best milk was a winner in the previous year (skim milk with monounsaturated vegetable oil added: no cholesterol).

For those who have not yet tried it, Ski DoubleUp consists of a not very remarkable-looking, small, two-part container. On the one side, taking up about 65% of the space, is vanilla-flavoured acidophilus and bifidus yoghurt. On the other is one of a number of varieties of fruit, muesli or nut-based accompaniments.

The secret of DoubleUp's success? According to Allen Roberts, its proud marketing manager, it is one part innovation, one part quality, one part versatility and one part 'healthiness'.

Traditionally fruit has been included in yoghurt; DoubleUp separates the two. Its yoghurt has also been developed from a new culture, which is claimed to give it a much less tart taste. And the product is promoted to be eaten throughout the day, from breakfast to dessert, snack to lunch.

Interestingly, the same company launched and later withdrew Oak Duo, a very similar product in the same sort of pack. Oak Duo, however, featured fromage frais rather than yoghurt and was much more of a dessert.

Roberts is very chary of admitting that Oak Duo was as much of a loser as Ski DoubleUp has been a winner. But the two products make an interesting case study. Just why one has done so well and the other not will undoubtedly remain a commercially confidential mystery.

GREEN'S POTATO & SAUCE

Dehydrated potato scallops with a powdered sauce inside a foil sachet — sound appetising? It may be hard to believe from that description, but this product is another 1993-94 *Foodweek* award winner.

Why go for sachet potatoes when you can buy so many good varieties of the real thing? Green's national sales and marketing manager, Rod Glover, says the answer lies in two words: "No mess — it's easy and quick". He also makes claims for the "consistency of quality" and "enhanced flavour" of his processed product as compared to ordinary spuds.

Since Green's launched Potato & Sauce about a year ago, 'value-added' side dishes have really taken off on the market, and Glover can only see them getting even bigger. Potato & Sauce now has competition from Maggi and Continental, but the Green's product was the first of its kind in Australia.

The company has also experienced great success with its Pancake Shake, a one-litre milk bottle-style powder product to which you add one and a half cups of water, shake and pour into the frying pan. The 'no mess' theory also explains the hit Pancake Shake has scored. Convenience mixes (pancake, cakes, muffins) are another growth market segment, although Glover does not perceive them to have the "huge potential" of value-added side dishes.

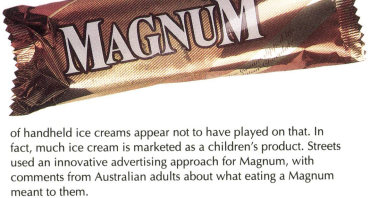
STREETS MAGNUM

Streets Magnum is the market leader among 'handheld' or 'individual-serve' ice creams. It is a big ice cream (hence the name) which also sports a slightly bigger than usual price tag ($2, about 25% higher than your average Streets Cornetto). Magnum was launched nationally in late 1992 in two varieties, dark or white chocolate; two more varieties have since been added.

At first glance we are not talking about anything so special here: after all, it's just ice cream covered with chocolate. So why has Magnum outstripped the competition?

Geoff Wilson, Streets' marketing director, makes claims about the product's quality first and foremost: "Magnum is a very creamy, thick ice cream. It is covered with the best chocolate in the world: pure Belgian imported. The denseness of the ice cream balances beautifully with the delicate chocolate."

Second, Wilson singles out the perceived 'adultness' of the product as a highly successful point of difference. Although ice cream does have a nostalgic appeal to adults (recollections of childhood, warm summer days and all that), other manufacturers of handheld ice creams appear not to have played on that. In fact, much ice cream is marketed as a children's product. Streets used an innovative advertising approach for Magnum, with comments from Australian adults about what eating a Magnum meant to them.



Wilson attributes the product's success to consumer demand for quality and value for money, and even that it "sets a new standard for what ice cream eating is all about. Sixty per cent of Australian adults have tried a Magnum."

Letters

ANZ defends service record

We were pleased to see that you focused on bank service recently (*Next please*, CHOICE, September 1994) but were disappointed with the quality of the research and the conclusions you drew from your survey conducted last year. At ANZ, we have undertaken extensive research into bank service, identifying the drivers of customer satisfaction and then restructuring our operations and training staff to effect a significant improvement in service levels.

You have characterised our Teller Queue Guarantee as mere gimmickry. Our research indicates that waiting a long time for teller service is customers' number one irritant. In focusing on average wait times, you have entirely missed the consumer concern, which is about how *often* they have to wait a *long time* for service. As a result, ANZ has worked very hard to ensure that we have staff available to meet customer demand. Our customers have welcomed the Guarantee, we've gained customers from competitors and less than 0.13% of customers claim to have waited more than five minutes.

Sutherland Smith, one of Australia's leading market research companies, recently conducted research which suggests an altogether different view of customer perceptions of ANZ than that portrayed in your article. It shows that, as a result of our initiatives, satisfaction with overall service has improved significantly and we are rated well ahead of our peers in terms of satisfaction with teller services.

We have a number of concerns about your survey methodology which lead me to believe your conclusions about ANZ's level of customer service are incorrect.

You have used the data from your survey to draw some conclusions which we consider unreasonable. For example, you state that the Teller Queue Guarantee is "... much more likely to put a strain on the bank's counter staff than cause a drain on its profits" and that it "makes serving fast the teller's primary objective, when his or her attention should be on serving best". ANZ's teller scheduling aims to ensure that well trained tellers are available to meet customer demand. In conjunction with the launch of the Guarantee, ANZ set service standards and conducted extra training for tellers to ensure a consistently high level of service. Our own survey of 3200 tellers indicates that staff do not feel pressured by management to ensure that the $5 is not paid. In fact we are encouraging managers to ensure that tellers willingly pay if a customer makes a claim. Staff are not pressured to "process" customers to save $5; superior service remains paramount. Naturally, after working so hard to improve service, staff have been very disappointed about your attacks on their efforts.

In conclusion, ANZ agrees with your statement that, "It is obviously time for the bigger institutions to take a good hard look at their customer service practices". ANZ has been doing so for some time now. More importantly, ANZ has been acting to improve these services to best meet customer expectations.

Susan McCarthy
General Manager Corporate Affairs
ANZ Bank

We follow the code of professional behaviour of the Market Research Society by including information on the methodology and limitations of our survey research in our articles. Due to the high level of interest in our surveys, we plan in future to include more information detailing the method, number of surveys mailed and returned, demographic profile of respondents and a comment on how representative they are of the wider population.

Mail surveys are an accepted and widely used method of collecting some types of data. In this instance, to ask a limited number of simple, straightforward questions of people around Australia, quickly and economically, it was appropriate to use a mail survey.

It's sometimes suggested that mail surveys elicit an unrepresentative set of responses from people with a grievance. Our experience over many years as well as the results of this banking survey indicate it is very unlikely bias was introduced by any group with very strong feelings. The respondents closely matched the profile of CHOICE subscribers in general, so we are satisfied they weren't a skewed or biased sample. They ranged from very satisfied to very unsatisfied bank customers across all banks, with no obvious or measurable bias to any. Numbers of responses per bank were roughly proportional to the number of branches the major banks have.

To reduce the possibility of memory errors, we asked people to record their experience on their next visit to the bank. This possibly reduced our response rate, as people may have forgotten or mislaid their questionnaire, but we have no doubt this method increased the accuracy of the responses.

We only asked people to report on one visit to their bank, so we have no data on how ***often*** *they have to wait a long time. But average waiting time is a compilation of individual experiences, so the higher it is, the more* ***likely*** *individuals are to have to wait a long time. We therefore consider it a suitable indicator of service. The results were in fact favourable for ANZ, which had an average waiting time of only three minutes. The survey was conducted before the introduction of ANZ's Teller Queue Guarantee.*

Send your letters to **CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204**. Where possible, please include your daytime telephone number, as we may wish to contact you direct for more information or to discuss your comments and queries.

FIZZIOLOGY

Chances are you'll be going to a party or celebration in the next few weeks. What sparkling wine will you take with you? Here's your conversation starter.

WILL A ROSÉ REMAIN A ROSÉ by any other name? By treaty with the European Community, Australia has agreed to end its controversial use of many common European wine names, including 'champagne'. The European Union (EU) regards these geographical names as part of its members' territory and intellectual property.

This is a process which is well under way. By December 1993 we had ceased using names like beaujolais, frascati and white bordeaux on Australian-made wines. An end-date for the hard core of 14 big names — including champagne, claret, chablis, port, sherry and burgundy — has not been finalised. However, there is agreement to come up with a timetable by the end of 1997 for their demise on Australian wine labels.

It's not all a one-way trade. In return for this agreement, the EU has dropped some of its anti-competitive legislation which has made it hard for Australian wines to make headway in Europe.

To the test

This report presents the results of a wine tasting of 57 dry (brut) sparkling wines from France and Australia. Additional inclusions were the top-selling imports **HENKELL TROCKEN Dry Sec** from Germany, **FREIXENET Cordon Negro Brut** from Spain, and **GRANDIN Brut**, a non-champagne from France. These three fill out the price gap between cheaper Australian sparkling wines and French champagne, as well as having the questionable allure of being special because they are imported.

First we'll tell you something about what makes a good sparkling wine (and how to recognise one); later we'll discuss the results of our test and make recommendations to guide your purchasing.

The right grapes

About 65% of the sparkling wines Australians buy are purchased for less than $6. That's why our focus this time is on the cheaper wines. These often bypass the classic champagne grape varieties of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier, in favour of cheaper, high-production grapes grown in the hotter irrigation areas of Australia, such as sultana, riesling and semillon.

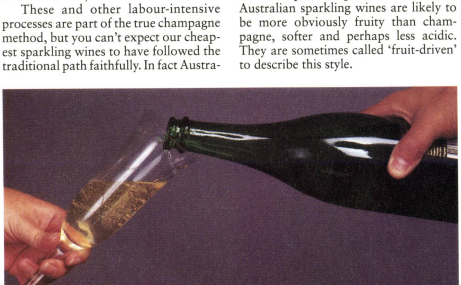
And we don't always make sparkling wines in the traditional champagne way. In Australia, 'méthode champenoise' is legally defined to mean the wine has been fermented in the same bottle in which it is finally presented to the consumer. However, there's a lot more to the champagne method: for example, regular twisting or movement of the bottles ('riddling') to make the yeast deposits slide towards the neck, and 'disgorgement' (where the neck of the bottle is plunged into a freezing solution of brine, decorked, and fermentation yeast deposits removed from the bottle while trapped in the small block of ice that has formed).

These and other labour-intensive processes are part of the true champagne method, but you can't expect our cheapest sparkling wines to have followed the traditional path faithfully. In fact Australian winemakers will have to drop the term 'méthode champenoise' when the EU treaty pulls the shutters down on the use of the word champagne.

What should it taste like?

Champagnes and other sparkling wines do not have to conform to one idea of taste. However, there are signs to guide your tasting:

- The wine should taste fresh and lively in your mouth. Acidity and sweetness should be in balance, where both sensations are present but neither dominates. Champagne may be toasty, buttery or bread-like in taste and aroma. Some are more yeasty than others — and that's a matter of personal preference. Premium Australian sparkling wines are likely to be more obviously fruity than champagne, softer and perhaps less acidic. They are sometimes called 'fruit-driven' to describe this style.



Pour the wine against the side of the glass, don't just splash it down the middle.

SPARKLING TIPS

Having bought some sparkling wine, here's how to store and pour it:

- Drink it fresh, don't stick it away in your cellar — sparkling wine is meant to be consumed when it is released for sale.
- Keep the wine bottles away from light, damp and vibration. Store them on their side, keeping the cork wet so it won't dry out and shrink (and thereby let in air).
- Ease out the cork and let the gas escape gently. Don't pop the cork — it releases carbon dioxide which would otherwise keep bubbling through the drink. However, don't let this rule stop you having fun!
- Ideally serve at 7-9°C, not ice-cold. Three or four hours in the fridge should do it, but keep sparkling wine out of the freezer as crystals may form.
- Purists use a flute or tulip-shaped glass — the shape preserves bubbles and delicate aromas longer.

■ When initially poured, there should be a soft, creamy head on top, called the 'mousse'. Streams of fine bubbles (the 'bead') will run up through the wine. The smaller the bubbles, the better — that's one sign of a great sparkling wine. But there's more: the bubbles should explode in your mouth like individual fireworks, not like the blurred, fizzy slush of a diet cola.

And the bubbles should last and last in the glass, churning over for several minutes before going flat. What's behind this action? As you'd expect, it's an area of continual scientific research. Champagne has 'wet foam' bubbles as opposed to the 'dry foam' bubbles found in beer. Beer bubbles take on a polyhedral (many-sided) shape as the liquid drains off them and falls back into the glass. This leaves a dry fluffy head. Indeed, beer can have a good head while there is little or no effervescence continuing. In contrast, champagne bubbles are spherical and remain surrounded with the liquid wine, so the bubbles are continually moving in the drink.

■ As for the aroma (or 'nose' as it's called), it can be floral, toasty, biscuity, nutty, herbal or fruity, but shouldn't be sulphurous or like damp cardboard.

Vintage or non-vintage?

When you look at the wine label you'll sometimes see the letters 'NV'. These stand for non-vintage, and mean the wine has been blended using wine reserved from more than one year's harvest. In fact some champagne companies will blend more than 100 different wines to make the final product.

When the wine is made exclusively from grapes harvested in the one year (from the same 'vintage') it can be presented with the identifying year on the label. Wine connoisseurs will know if the year produced a good vintage for wines from the particular geographical region. For example, 1990 was an excellent vintage for white wines from South Australia's Barossa Valley, but a poor white vintage for the Hunter Valley in NSW.

Many winemakers will not release a vintage wine from a year which is not up to standard. As a guideline, non-vintage wines tend to be lighter styles than vintages. Use a non-vintage wine as an aperitif or with fish, and a vintage wine with red meat or most other meals — if the food has a lot of flavour you should choose a wine with the power to match it (see *Tasting notes* in the table on pages 22-23).

Additives – a problem?

The main chemical additive in sparkling wine is the ubiquitous preservative sulphur dioxide. Asthmatics should always be wary of food and beverages containing this compound as it can trigger an attack in sensitive individuals.

Fortunately, levels of sulphur dioxide are quite low in sparkling wines because carbonation helps control bacteria without much need for preservatives. Some wines don't have sulphur dioxide added, but it doesn't mean there is none present: sulphur dioxide occurs naturally in wine.

Another common additive is ascorbic acid (vitamin C). This is an antioxidant which also inhibits browning of the grapes.

Which wines are best?

To find out the best buys from the 57 wines in this selection, we brought together a panel of expert tasters. Each wine was served in an unmarked glass so the panellists didn't know what they were getting. However, they were aware of the different categories:

■ Wines costing less than or equal to $16 recommended retail price (RRP).

■ Non-vintage wines costing more than $16 RRP.

■ Vintage wines costing more than $16 RRP.

Wines were scored on a show judging system (appearance, nose and palate) out of a maximum of 20 points. Scores (see the table) are relative within the category, not between categories.

The experts' scores for each wine were averaged to arrive at the ranking shown in the table.

Poor showing by cheaper imports

Just because a wine is imported doesn't mean it's better.

Out tasting panel scored down two popular imported wines — GRANDIN Brut and HENKELL TROCKEN Dry Sec, finding them pretty ordinary in this company. Their low price (compared to champagne) doesn't mean they're good value.

The variation of vintages

Some wines dipped out this time when they'd excelled at our last tasting (CHOICE, December 1991). For example, CROSER and MOET & CHANDON Vintage scored lower than at the 1991 tasting. How can this be?

The answer is the wines are from different vintages from those tasted last time. Each year has its own attributes, depending on the sugar content of the grapes, whether the growing season was hot, dry, wet, long or short or affected by biological attack (pest or pestilence).

To a degree the winemakers try to keep each year's production to a formula or house style, perhaps by bringing in grapes from another climate, or by varying the proportions of grape varieties. Many other tricks of the trade are used.

But there can also be variation from one bottle to another — it's a fact of life with which drinkers of premium wines have to learn to live.

Conclusion

The surprise was the good showing of GREAT WESTERN wines. They offer a slight value-for-money edge over their immediate competitors.

For a dollar or two extra, SEAVIEW remains an excellent choice and a more sophisticated wine than the GREAT WESTERNs. Note that our panellists slightly preferred the SEAVIEW Grande Cuvée variety, so look for this one in the shops.

Many more expensive Australian sparkling wines offer great value and a more full-blooded experience. The stand-out here is YALUMBA 'D' 1990 — a very classy wine — but ROSEMOUNT Brut 1991 is the value pick.

THANKS TO OUR EXPERT PANEL

For this report we brought together a tasting panel of experts from a range of backgrounds (left to right, standing):

■ Michael Kluczko (chief winemaker, sparkling wines, for Seppelt).

■ Mark Shield (wine writer for *The Age*).

■ Warren Randall (chief winemaker for Andrew Garrett wines).

Seated, left to right:

■ Huon Hooke (wine writer for the *Sydney Morning Herald*).

■ Rodney Hooper (winemaker/manager, Charles Sturt University Winery).

■ Peter Bourne (wine retailer and consultant).

Thanks to our panellists for their time, expertise and care.

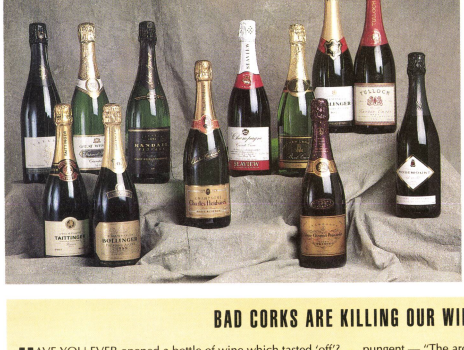
If you want to try 'real' champagne, you can't go past the **BOLLINGER Special Cuvée Brut**. It's in sensational form and would make a great introduction to classic champagne style. It's also a very full taste, so if you'd prefer something lighter and softer we'd recommend **CHARLES HEIDSIECK Brut Reserve**.

And if you're feeling reckless and the occasion requires you to go completely over the top, **DOM PERIGNON** was the preferred wine from our super-premium category in the last CHOICE report (the current vintage is 1985). What's it like? Absolutely fabulous.

WHAT TO BUY

If price is not a concern, buy the wines with the top scores in each category in the table. We've combined these with our **Good Value** wines to make up the **CHOICE MIXED DOZEN** — even the cheaper ones here are worth a taste.

If you're a regular drinker of sparkling wines and are looking for something new and a bit different, buy a bottle from the *Mixed emotions* list. These are wines which raised controversy among our panellists, but you may find something you'll devour passionately.



THE CHOICE MIXED DOZEN

The prices shown were quoted to us in September by a major national chain. Where the wine is subject to occasional heavy discounting we have shown that price in brackets. **$$** denotes good value.

UP TO $16

$$	**SEAVIEW** Grande Cuvée	$7 ($6)
	TULLOCH Hunter Cuvée Brut 1990	$12
$$	**GREAT WESTERN** Imperial Reserve	$6 ($5)
$$	**MATTHEW LANG & CO** Brut Cuvée	$5 ($3)

MORE THAN $16 — NON-VINTAGE

	BOLLINGER Special Cuvée Brut	$60
	CHARLES HEIDSIECK Brut Reserve	$50
	TAITTINGER Brut Reserve	$50 ($40)

MORE THAN $16 — VINTAGE

	BOLLINGER Grande Année 1985	$85
	VEUVE CLICQUOT PONSARDIN Brut 1985	$73
	YALUMBA 'D' 1990	$23
$$	**ROSEMOUNT** Brut 1991	$15.50
	RANDALL Sauvage 1991	$23 ($20)

MIXED EMOTIONS

AUSTRALIAN

ANDREW GARRETT NV Pinot Noir	$13 ($10)
EDMOND MAZURE 1990	$15*
FLEUR DE LYS Premium Cuvée	$10 ($8)
KAISER STUHL Brut	$5.50 ($4)
RICHMOND GROVE Brut NV	$12.50

FRENCH

G H MUMM Cordon Rouge 1987	$45
VEUVE CLICQUOT PONSARDIN Brut	$45

* Discontinued since our test, but may still be available in shops.

BAD CORKS ARE KILLING OUR WINES

HAVE YOU EVER opened a bottle of wine which tasted 'off'? It may be the wine is 'corked': the wine will smell musty and dank, while the flavours will be less attractive or dynamic than you expect or remember from previous outings. In short, the good flavours are masked.

It's not a small problem. At a recent course held at the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI), 720 bottles were opened for evaluation. Of these, nearly 6% were tainted due to mould in the cork.

The industry believes the figure is closer to 2%, but Dr Terry Lee of AWRI thinks "the reality is less". However, he has also seen figures as high as 15% of bottles affected in some trials. Each batch is a different situation. What makes it hard to know with certainty is that people don't return their 'corked' bottles. "The consumer will purchase a favourite wine and find a mouldy, 'off' flavour. They won't return the bottle — they just won't buy it again. This is exasperating to the wine industry," says Dr Lee. And, "It's a problem which doesn't discriminate between high-cost and low-cost wines."

The problem is caused by moulds growing on the cork either in Portugal (where most of our corks originate), during transport or in Australia. The main culprit is a compound known as 2,4,6-trichloroanisole, or TCA. This compound is incredibly pungent — "The aroma can be detected in a concentration as tiny as five parts per trillion. Wine is a good solvent and quickly extracts this compound from the cork," says Dr Lee.

What can be done about TCA? Over the past decade the Portuguese cork industry has developed several new treatments to minimise the effects of corking, and research continues.

The most obvious alternative is the metal screw-on cap. This technology has been around for the last 20 years and will keep the wine in very good condition. And, contrary to popular belief, cork is not necessary for the development of desirable aged characteristics in the wine. Cork was chosen because it shapes to fit irregularities in the bottle neck and can therefore give a good seal. "Even if we didn't use cork, the aging changes would still take place in the wine," notes Dr Lee.

It's a simple solution, but the industry thinks people won't go for it. Will consumers continue to buy wines when there's no ritual of pulling, popping and inspecting the cork? Many people are happy enough to drink wines from plastic bags in casks or from small screw-capped bottles on planes. Perhaps one day cork will be history, though such a shift will deal a heavy blow to Portugal's export earnings.

In the meantime, if you open a wine and it smells musty and dank, take it back and ask for a replacement.

Sparkling wines

Brand (in order of tasting scores, within groups)

$16 (RRP) or less

	1 Price ($)	Origin	**2** Additives	**3** Averaged score	Tasting notes
equal	**$$ SEAVIEW** Grande Cuvée	7	Australia	220, 300	16.3	Straw colour, good mousse, nutty/toast/peach aromas, fruit-driven with dry finish and good aftertaste — "very drinkable"
	TULLOCH Hunter Cuvée Brut 1990	12	Australia	220, 300	16.3	Gold colour, good mousse, stylish toasty aroma, broad full-flavoured older style — "sparkling white burgundy"
	$$ GREAT WESTERN Imperial Reserve	6	Australia	220, 300	15.9	Excellent creamy mousse, pale straw yellow, delicate bready/yeast aroma, light easy-drinking style shows good crisp length and a dry finish — "good value"
	GREAT WESTERN Brut Reserve	6	Australia	220, 300	15.8	Strong frothy mousse, bright straw colour, light toasty/yeast aroma, lighter dry style shows some elegance but little fruit — "refreshing"
equal	**SEAVIEW** Brut	7	Australia	220, 300	15.7	Straw colour, little mousse, toasty/yeasty aroma, simple toast/yeast flavours lead to a dry but short finish — "pleasant but little aftertaste"
	YALUMBA Angas Brut NV	11	Australia	220, 300	15.7	Gold/amber colour, good mousse, aged toast/yeast/fruity aromas, rich fruit complexity and good length of flavour — "generous flavour and class"
	ANDREW GARRETT NV Pinot Noir	13	Australia	220, 301	15.5	Salmon pink with onion skin brown tinge, fine mousse with little beading, strawberry pinot nose with nice toasty/bready/yeast aromas, more complex structure leads to richer and broader flavours with good balance — "lovely pinot nose"
	KILLAWARRA Premier Brut 1991	11.50	Australia	220, 300	15.4	Excellent fine bead and creamy mousse, bright straw colour, toasty/nutty/caramel aromas, plenty of acid in the mix gives a dry but simple style — "zesty pre-dinner drink"
	MINCHINBURY Brut	6	Australia	220, 300	15.3	Straw colour, low mousse, light and almost neutral in aroma, light creamy and sweet with little fruit showing and a short finish — "creamy"
	FLEUR DE LYS Premium Cuvée	10	Australia	220, 300	15.2	Pale lemon yellow colour with good mousse, toasty and green fruit/apple aromas, simple thin palate showing little fruit and finishing slightly hard and acid — "a basic model"
equal	**GRAMP'S** Brut NV	12	Australia	220, 318	15.2	Brownish tint, low mousse, strong smoky/Marmite/bready aromas, broad sweet rich fruit flavour but little elegance — "a one-glass wine"
	$$ MATTHEW LANG & CO Brut Cuvée	5	Australia	220, 300	15.2	Very pale colour — almost water-white, good mousse, light fresh limey nose, light, simple and crisp — "punch style"
	JEAN PIERRE & CO Classique	4.50	Australia	220	15.1	Bright straw colour, low mousse, tropical fruit/candy aromas, some fruit flavour but lacks acid to balance the sugary taste — "soft and sweet"
equal	**WOLF BLASS** Brut NV	12	Australia	220, 300	15.0	Straw colour, low mousse, subdued fruit aroma, sweet short and fruity with a hardened edge — "straightforward"
	YELLOWGLEN Pinot Noir Chardonnay Brut NV	13	Australia	220, 300	15.0	Pale straw colour, coarse mousse, fruity/biscuit nose, clean lean and neutral palate with a lemon tartness — "pleasant though little to say"
	TRILOGY Premium Cuvée Brut	11	Australia	220, 300	14.9	Brownish tinge and little mousse, sweet fruit and toasty/yeast aromas, shows some complexity but the finish is hard — "ordinary"
	MINCHINBURY White Seal	6	Australia	220, 300	14.8	Straw colour, grapy/grassy aroma, clean and simple fruit-driven palate which is slightly sweet — "clean and simple"
equal	**NORMANS** Cuvée Brut	5	Australia	220, 301	14.8	Light brass colour with good mousse, musty aroma, caramel sweetness gives plenty of flavour which may become cloying — "overtaken by sweetness"
	RICHMOND GROVE Brut NV	12.50	Australia	220, 318	14.8	Brownish/bronze colour, low mousse, dull Marmite aroma, soft broad sherry-type flavours suggest staleness — "tired"
	WOLF BLASS Vintage Pinot Noir Chardonnay 1990	16	Australia and NZ	220, 300	14.8	Straw colour, low mousse, light fruit aroma, lively acid style which is a bit lean and austere on fruit flavours — "crisp and lively"
	COCKATOO RIDGE Brut NV	8.50	Australia	220, 300	14.7	Pale pink onion skin colour, stale smoky aroma, soft full fruit palate with good balance but a short finish — "soft and sweet"
equal	**KAISER STUHL** Brut	5.50	Australia	220, 300	14.6	Straw colour, vigorous mousse, peachy/buttery aromas, simple fruit taste with low acid — "plain and simple"
	TALTARNI Brut Taché *(A)*	14	Australia	220	14.6	Bright pink colour, low mousse, cherry aroma, plain sweet and with a hard acid finish — "one-dimensional"
equal	**KILLAWARRA** Brut NV	8.50	Australia	220, 300	14.5	Slight sulphur nose, straw colour, thin hard and simple palate leading to a dry acid finish — "basic"
	QUEEN ADELAIDE Vintage Brut 1991	8	Australia	220, 300	14.5	Amber/gold colour, aged biscuit/toffee/nutty aromas, broad and hollow palate yet finishes with dry slightly bitter taste — "simple"
equal	**CARRINGTON** Fine Brut Premium Cuvée	6	Australia	220, 300	14.3	Mid-lemon colour, light fruity (citrus) aroma, big broad and slightly coarse in taste and length — "a cheapie"
	SIR JAMES Cuvée Brut	11	Australia	220, 300	14.3	Slight brown tinge, little mousse, soft yeast aroma, simple slightly sweet/candy flavour lacks acid balance — "uninspiring"
	FREIXENET Cordon Negro Brut	13	Spain	220	14.0	Pale straw colour, fine bead, lolly/vegetal nose, sweet and short style lacks freshness and clean flavour — "unusual"
equal	**JEAN PIERRE & CO** Brut	4.50	Australia	220	13.9	Straw colour, good mousse, candied/minty/muscat aromas, simple sweet fruit flavour lacks style — "just sweet"
	YELLOWGLEN Vintage 1991 Brut	17*	Australia	220, 300	13.9	Pale gold colour, excellent mousse, smelly sappy/green/cabbage aromas, sour and austere in flavour with sulphide showing — "poor value"
	HARDYS Courier Première Cuvée Brut	9	Australia	220, 300	13.5	Straw colour, fine mousse, sulphur nose, light watery simple palate lacks length and style — "falls away"
equal	**GRANDIN** Brut	14	France	220, 300	12.8	Pale straw colour, low mousse, flinty sulphide nose, soapy thin and unusual palate — "unpleasant"
	PINE RIDGE Brut Reserve	10	Australia	220	12.8	Pale gold colour, good mousse, muscat/burnt match/volatile aromas, plain hard acid and sweet/sour palate — "lemon drop"

Sparkling wines

Brand (in order of tasting scores, within groups)

	1 Price ($)	Origin	2 Additives	3 Averaged score	Tasting notes
More than $16 (RRP) – Non-vintage					
BOLLINGER Special Cuvée Brut	60	France	220	17.8	Deep brass colour, low bead and mousse, fresh sherry/bready/yeasty aroma, rich nutty palate and a lingering dry acid finish — "a BIG champagne"
CHARLES HEIDSIECK Brut Reserve	50	France	220, 300	17.0	Strong sherry/nutty/aged nose, sweeter complex style with fruit richness and wonderful length — "elegant and refreshing"
TAITTINGER Brut Reserve	50	France	220, 330	16.8	Deep straw colour, fine bead and low mousse, honey/yeast/sherry/Vegemite aromas, sweeter and simpler than the Bollinger style, with a honey/nutty/sherry taste followed by a high acid finish — "classy and easy to drink"
LOUIS ROEDERER Brut Premier	50	France	220	16.7	Straw colour, bread/caramel and mushroom aromas, a sweeter style with good acid length and rich fruit flavour — "a mouthful of wine"
POMMERY Brut Royal	45	France	220, 300	16.3	Straw colour, low mousse and fine bead, broader toasty/nutty/yeasty aroma, attractive nutty and citrus flavours but lacking the complex structure and characters of the best champagnes — "a simpler style of champagne"
GH MUMM Cordon Rouge Brut	46	France	220	16.0	Straw colour, low mousse, simple straw/fruit nose, light sugary palate and a fresh taste — "lacks intensity"
VEUVE CLICQUOT PONSARDIN Brut	45	France	220	15.9	Straw colour, low mousse, light fruit nose, a simple sweet fruit-driven wine that lacks full complexity — "light and simple"
MOET & CHANDON Brut Imperial	80	France	220	15.8	Straw colour, very fine bead, vegetal/rubber yeast nose, toasty/nutty fruit up-front leading to hard acid finish — "flavoursome"
PIPER-HEIDSIECK Cuvée Brut	30	France	220, 300	15.8	Pale straw colour, fine bead, delicate fruit nose, elegant but simple and fresh, clean fruit style — "dry pre-dinner drink"
HENKELL TROCKEN Dry Sec	14*	Germany	220	13.8	Pale straw colour, low mousse and bead, stagnant sulphide and floral nose, sweet basic flavour and unusual dry finish — "sweet and unusual"
More than $16 (RRP) – Vintage					
BOLLINGER Grande Année 1985	85	France	220	17.3	Straw colour, fine bead, big complex nose shows nutty/marzipan/cashew aromas, complex and broad in flavour with nutty/sherry/yeasty character and a long finish — "a HUGE wine — not for the faint-hearted"
VEUVE CLICQUOT PONSARDIN Brut 1985	73	France	220	17.3	Straw colour, low mousse and fine bead, nutty/sherry/bread aromas, nutty/yeast/sherry/ savoury palate leads to an excellent long dry acid finish — "mouth-filling flavour"
LOUIS ROEDERER Brut 1988	46	France	220	16.8	Straw colour, fine bead, apricot/yeasty aromas, peachy stone fruit and yeast flavours give the wine complexity and good length — "fine and fruity"
POMMERY Brut 1987	30	France	220	16.8	Amber/gold colour, slightly burned butter/nut aromas, complex butterscotch/toasty palate with excellent acid length — "austere but interesting"
GH MUMM Cordon Rouge 1987	45	France	220	16.7	Deep straw colour, vegetal/toasty/Vegemite aromas, lime/citrus palate with lots of flavour and an acid end which lingers — "big on flavour with citrus standing out"
YALUMBA 'D' 1990	23	Australia	220, 300	16.0	Amber/gold colour, fine bead, light nutty/toasty nose, toasty and light in flavour with a shorter finish — "simple and refreshing"
RANDALL Sauvage 1991	23	Australia	220	15.8	Pale straw, fine bead and mousse, light fresh fruit nose, green/herbal flavours in a very dry wine — "young and dry"
$$ ROSEMOUNT Brut 1991	15.50*	Australia	220, 300	15.8	Deep straw colour, good mousse, fresh tropical fruit aromas, spicy peach flavours and a clean fresh palate — "young and peachy"
EDMOND MAZURE 1990	15*	Australia	220, 300	15.7	Pale straw colour, fresh yeasty/lime aromas, more delicate yeast flavours and good length — "fresh with soft flavours"
SEPPELT Salinger 1990	27	Australia and NZ	220, 300	15.7	Green straw colour, good mousse, neutral nose, clean fresh and simple wine shows some fruit and steely acid — "fresh and dry"
MOET & CHANDON Brut Imperial 1988	73	France	220	15.3	Straw colour, fine bead, mushroom/toasty/yeast aromas, sweetish broad flavours and a lingering dry acid finish — "lacking complexity"
DOMAINE CHANDON Brut 1991-1	25	Australia	220	15.1	Straw/brass colour, little aroma, simple melon/fruit palate lacks character and depth — "dull"
CROSER 1991	27.50	Australia	None	14.8	Pale straw colour, fine bead, grassy/herbal fruit aroma, fresh lime/tropical fruit flavours without complexity — "tropical fruit"
PIPER-HEIDSIECK Brut 1985	30	France	220, 300	14.7	Straw colour, unusual grass and toasty aromas, plenty of flavour and length but not particularly like the other champagnes; a trace of sulphur — "lightweight and lacking"

$$ Wines which represent good value for money within the price group and type.
RRP Recommended retail price.
(A) This wine has a deliberate pink colour. Although there are no other 'pinks' in the tasting, the judges felt it was appropriate to include the wine in this company as it does not have the word 'pink' or 'rosé' in the title. The wine was not penalised for its colour.
* See *Price*, right.

1 Price

Prices vary greatly and significant discounts can be found. As a guide we have given prices obtained from a national liquor chain in September 1994. In some cases (marked *) the price now puts the wine outside the categories as tested, though this was not the situation at the time, when categories were based on recommended retail price.

2 Additives

■ 220: sulphur dioxide — a preservative which helps prevent browning in the grape and inhibits the growth of bacteria which might otherwise dominate the yeast in fermentation; it also stabilises the wine colour. Note that a small amount of sulphur dioxide is present naturally in wine.

■ 300: ascorbic acid — also known as vitamin C, it is an antioxidant which also inhibits browning of the grapes.

■ 301: sodium ascorbate — acts like ascorbic acid.

■ 318: sodium erythorbate — acts like ascorbic acid.

■ 330: citric acid — helps prevent wine becoming cloudy.

3 Averaged score

The maximum score is 20, and the points awarded by all six judges were averaged. The price category was taken into account by the judges when awarding points. For example, a wine with a score of 16 in the first category (less than $16) would not be as good as a wine with the same score in one of the other more expensive categories.

Total recall?

How successful are car companies at getting consumers to respond to a safety recall campaign? On average, 25% of cars don't get fixed — that's a lot of unchecked and some unsafe cars on the road.

SOME MERCEDES-BENZ DRIVERS may find when they stamp on the brake pedal it suddenly slips up under the dashboard.

And there's a particular model of Holden Jackaroo with an oil leak which might catch fire; even a Peugeot owner might have to deal with an engine fire caused by leaking fuel or power steering fluid. There's a Nissan which may lose steering control, a Mazda 626 with headlight failure and another whose doors might open unexpectedly. You may own a certain model of Holden Commodore or Toyota Lexcen with cruise control which could take matters into its own hands and start accelerating without your assistance.

This is just a sample of vehicles recalled during the last 12 months. And there are more: in the first nine months of 1994 there were 32 recalls affecting 200,000 vehicles. There's an average of 30 recalls per year, but the peak year was 1990, when there were 53 separate vehicle recall campaigns. Were you aware of them?

Some faults have the potential to cause serious injury. A recent recall for certain Honda Integras and Civics was initiated because the automatic transmission could read 'Park', for example, but still be in gear and under power — the car could move unexpectedly. Car recalls are necessary to keep consumers safe and to preserve the value of their investment in the vehicle itself. But not all recall campaigns get a good response from consumers — some only result in a 50% success rate.

You can imagine how unwelcome (to a car importer or manufacturer) is the news that a recall campaign may be necessary. One individual recall campaign late last year reputedly cost the maker $4.5 million. Then there's the legacy of bad publicity affecting the model and its brand. Yet the reality is that the industry has become much more active in anticipating potential product defects and initiating a recall campaign before anyone has been injured. There's a positive side to this story.

The issue is much more one of getting car owners to respond more fully. A surprising number of consumers don't hear about the recall or fail to respond for other reasons. How does the system work and what is required of car makers and importers?

What must be done

Car recalls are run according to an industry code of practice. Though the code is voluntary, the federal Trade Practices Act stands in the background to give it legal weight. The Federal Bureau of Consumer Affairs is responsible for enforcing the recall provisions of the Trade Practices Act, and the Federal Office of Road Safety (FORS)monitors car recalls on its behalf.

However, it's never been necessary to mandate a recall as most companies are quick to act, although, "Some makers comply reluctantly," says Lawrence Glynn, Principal Engineer with the Federal Office of Road Safety. "We've got close on a few occasions to waving the big stick."

One key section of the code concerns the difficult problem of notifying car owners of the recall. It's an exacting discipline:

- First there's a letter sent to the last known address for the car, taken from the manufacturer's or importer's records.
- If this gets no response a further letter follows, this time by certified mail.
- If there's still no answer, the car company gets in touch with the local state motor registry and obtains registration details for the current owner of the car.
- A letter (certified mail again) goes off to the new address.
- Meanwhile, recall notices may appear in the press. Unfortunately public notices aren't mandatory — provided the car company can persuade the government that it can reach most owners by mail.

The Federal Office of Road Safety considers all car recalls are 'public' once the letters go out, even where no notice appears in the newspapers. In a strict sense this is true, but it does enable some recalls to remain more private than others. Vehicle Standards Bulletin 3, which is published quarterly by FORS, lists all recalls and is widely distributed within the industry. We believe there should always be at least one public notice in a national newspaper. It would also help those in the community (like ourselves) who try to keep an eye on such things.

We think government agencies should play a larger role in enforcing a better quality of public recall notice. This is a concern shared by the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV). "I don't find them particularly easy to read," says Michael Case, Chief Engineer with the RACV — which, on the whole, thinks the recall process is working well. "It takes me a fair while to read through them and work out what the problem is."

Recall notices need to get to the point quickly: the heading or opening sentence should give consumers a clear idea of the safety implications of the recall. The notice shouldn't look as if it was written by the marketing department to minimise the negative effect of the campaign on the brand's reputation.

What has been learnt about recall campaigns?

Government agencies are coy about revealing actual brand-by-brand statistics on this issue, but some things have been learnt:

- **Car age:** a recall campaign will be more successful if it is initiated within the first six months of original sale of the car, or its warranty period.
- **Number sold:** a lower response rate is expected if the car was sold in large numbers.

DESIGNING A RECALL NOTICE
'DEFECTS' SOUNDS SO NEGATIVE
MAYBE WE CAN MAKE THEM INTO A FEATURE?
WE COULD CALL THEM EXCLUSIVE DEFECTS

■ **Dealer network:** there tends to be a better consumer response where the brand is represented by a strong dealer network. For example, some dealers check the owner's address every time the car is brought in for service.

■ **Type of fault:** unfortunately it can't be said that consumers respond more readily and completely to a recall when a serious safety issue is involved. For example, a recall campaign to replace vehicle compliance plates achieved a better response rate (81%) than a seatbelt mounting recall on the same model of vehicle (67%).

Traps to watch out for

Does a recall campaign concern you if you don't own the affected car? It might.

When you come to buy your next used car, will you know if there has been a recall on that model? And was the problem fixed on the particular car you're buying? Your car could be unsafe.

What you can do

What can you do to find out? Telephone the local authorised dealer — they should be able to confirm if your intended vehicle has been recalled and repaired.

It's a good idea, when buying a used car, to get in touch with the maker and ask to have your name and address recorded.

The industry is working to create a standard marking system so car owners will know if their vehicle has been fixed. Already various informal systems are in use: look for a sticker on the firewall, driver's door jamb, inside the glovebox or on the log book.

On a more regular basis, keep an eye on the *Recalls and bans* column in each month's CHOICE. And remember: any necessary inspection, repair or replacement should be free of charge. ❑

The 14th CHOICE Subscriber Draw

For new subscriptions and renewals received October 1 to December 31, 1994

Subscriber draws are now held quarterly and on January 4, 1995, we'll be holding our fourteenth. The lucky winner will be able to choose any two products from the following tests, published April 1994 to June 1994.

- ☐ Microwave ovens — medium size (April)
- ☐ Video recorders (May)
- ☐ Safety switches (May)
- ☐ Steam irons (May)
- ☐ Televisions — 68 cm (June)
- ☐ Fan heaters (June)

These are products we bought for testing, so you won't be the first to turn them on or set them up. But we'll cover any service problems with a CHOICE warranty that'll match the manufacturers' — just as if you'd bought them new.

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(If you're not due to renew your subscription during the period, don't worry, we'll be holding other draws during the year — your renewal notice will have the details. And if you're on a two-year subscription you'll be entered on your first anniversary as well as when you renew again.)

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3. Employees, and their immediate families, of the Australian Consumers' Association and its associated companies and agencies are ineligible to enter.
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   Reply Paid No. 24, ACA, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, without subscribing to the magazine.
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9. Last date for receipt of entries to the draw is December 31, 1994. No responsibility accepted for lost, late or misdirected mail.
10. The draw will be conducted at the office of the Consumers' Association at 10 am on January 4, 1995.
11. The winner will be notified by letter and published in the earliest feasible issue of CHOICE after that.
12. The promoter is Australian Consumers' Association, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204.
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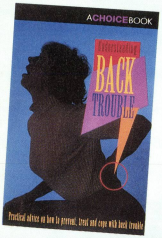

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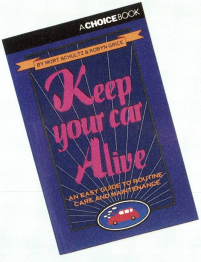
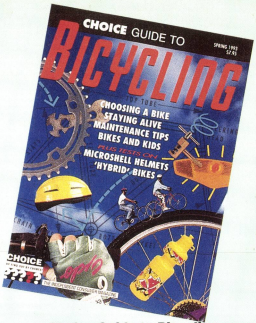


Keep Your Car Alive

An Easy Guide to Routine Care and Maintenance

The key to having a car that ages well is to prevent trouble before it happens. *Keep Your Car Alive* supplies all the information you need about routine maintenance to keep your vehicle in optimum condition. An extensive checklist will help all car owners — first-timers or old hands.

$16 paperback 128 pp Code: KYCA

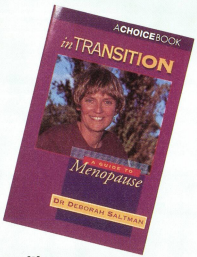


Choice Guide to Bicycling

1993 Edition

Deciding to buy a bike is the easy part — working out what you need, what you want and what accessories you need is the hard bit. This guide helps you with those questions, plus gives you some handy hints on teaching children to ride and how to foil bike thieves.

$6 magazine-style 76 pp Code: CGBI



In Transition

A Guide to Menopause

In Transition covers the issues surrounding menopause in a clear, easily understood, non-patronising way. Topics include: your relationship with your doctor; HRT; osteoporosis; cancer; heart disease; incontinence and prolapse; and conventional and alternative strategies for dealing with problems which may arise.

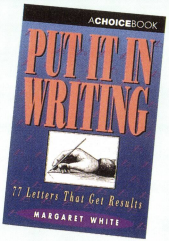
$17 paperback 184 pp Code: IT

Facefacts

A Guide to Cosmetics, Skin and Hair Care

Beauty choices for the discerning cosmetics purchaser. *Facefacts* guides you through the thickets of advertising claims and distinguishes the hype from the hard facts, explaining phrases like 'hypoallergenic', 'comedogenic' and 'natural'. It looks at many issues, including testing on animals, how the sun damages your skin, and how best to protect it.

$18 paperback 240 pp Code: FF



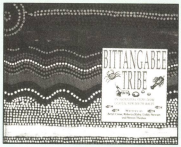
Put It In Writing

77 Letters That Get Results

We all know an effectively worded letter can get results. But quite often we give up before we start, because we don't know how to write the letter. This book contains 77 well-considered, cool and authoritative letters, written by a lawyer, which can be adapted to suit your situation.

$16 paperback 168 pp Code: PIIW

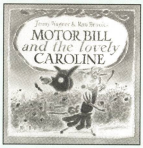
CHILDREN'S BOOKS



Bittangabee Tribe

The story of Ninima and his family, members of the Bittangabee tribe, their long summer trek to collect bogong moths from the mountains and their return to their home by the sea. Written by Aboriginal adult literacy students from the Eden region of NSW; illustrated by the students of Eden Primary School. For ages 6 – 10.

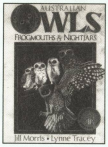
$19 hardcover 32 pp **Code: BT**



Motor Bill and the Lovely Caroline

Motor Bill was different from everyone else — he had a car, even if he was the only one who could see it. Nobody else believed in his car — except Caroline, maybe. This picture book is about friendship, and also about being different. For ages 6 – 10.

$19 hardcover 32 pp **Code: MBLC**



Australian Owls, Frogmouths & Nightjars

Each owl, frogmouth or nightjar included in this book is presented by a beautiful painting, whimsical verse and factual details of its habitat and lifestyle.

$16 paperback 48 pp **Code: AOFN**

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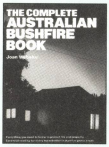
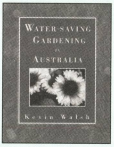


The Complete Australian Bushfire Book

A detailed guide to bushfires and their prevention. It covers how bushfires start, how to react to a bushfire, how to include fire-resistant features in your home, school or business premises, what to do if you're travelling when a bushfire threatens, and first aid measures.

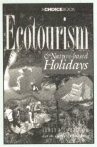
$30 paperback 298 pp **Code: CABB**



Water-saving Gardening in Australia

This book is perfect for those who want to use water wisely and still have a beautiful garden. It includes information about designing a water-efficient garden, how to minimise water needs in both city and country areas, and a comprehensive list of water-saving plants.

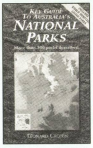
$20 hardcover 198 pp **Code: WSGA**



Ecotourism & Nature-Based Holidays

An insight into a new sort of holiday — ecotourism. Enjoy your surroundings while learning about them, and without creating havoc in the Australian environment. This guide gives you information about tour operators, resorts and other attractions.

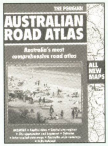
$17 paperback 224 pp Code: ENBH



Key Guide to Australia's National Parks

Australia has a magnificent series of national parks and this book will allow you to get the most out of them. Details include: how to get there, accommodation, walking trails, landscape details, geological formations and other features. This book is a perfect travelling companion or aid in planning your next holiday.

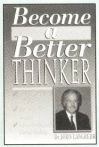
$27 paperback 304 pp Code: KGAP



The Penguin Australian Road Atlas

A comprehensive Australia-wide road guide. It includes 129 maps, including capital city maps, regional maps, and approach and bypass routes for each state capital. Information regarding isolated areas is also included on some maps.

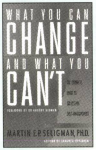
$20 paperback 162 pp Code: PARA



Become a Better Thinker

Learning to think more effectively is not just something for final-year students. With the help of useful exercises you can discover your thinking style, improve your memory and critical thinking, and become a more creative thinker.

$15 paperback 120 pp Code: BABT



What You Can Change and What You Can't

This book clearly and realistically identifies the areas in your life you can change and helps you decide how to act upon them. Looking at the general and the specific, some of the areas covered include: phobias, post-traumatic stress, weight control, alcoholism, depression and anger.

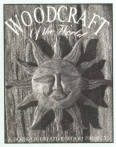
$20 paperback 324 pp Code: WYCC

Anxiety Attack: Don't Panic!

Five steps to recovery

Eight to ten per cent of the Australian population suffers from an anxiety disorder. This book is optimistic without being simplistic. It offers the sufferer a five-step recovery plan and meditation exercises, and also includes case histories.

$13 paperback 104 pp Code: AADP



Woodcraft of the World

This beautiful book can be used as a style guide or as a DIY handbook. *Woodcraft of the World* shows 11 international styles of woodcraft, including German, French provincial, Australian colonial and Islamic fretwork. Also included are step-by-step instructions to creating 22 different items using these styles.

$50 hardcover 176 pp Code: WCOW

Papercraft Gifts & Projects

Papercraft gifts are personal, different and inexpensive to make. There are many techniques and a variety of them is illustrated in this book, including weaving, quilling, papier mâché, embossing, découpage and marbling. This is a book that has a dual purpose — as an aid to making original and personal gifts or as a beautiful gift itself.

$25 paperback 160 pp Code: PGAP

Master Works

How to use paint finishes to transform your surroundings

Practical and inspirational ideas and techniques for designing and decorating furniture, walls, floors and fabrics with wonderful painted finishes. Superbly illustrated and covering many new and old techniques, this book will inspire novice and experienced practitioner alike.

$40 hardcover 182 pp Code: MW

Block aid

Bringing in a professional strata manager to run your block of units may solve many internal problems — but what do you know about their ways?

THE 1991 NATIONAL CENSUS TELLS us that 7.7% of Australians live in a flat or apartment, and this is predicted to increase rapidly in our cities as governments and developers push the idea of medium-density housing. Are you ready for corporate living?

What do you know about the rules of life in a strata title building, or about keeping the collective business side under some sort of control? We'll take you through the basics here, and raise some of our concerns about the strata managers' profession as established throughout most of Australia.

Only in NSW and the Northern Territory are there comprehensive systems of regulation for this industry. Yet strata managers are handling the regular financial contributions (levies) of thousands of unit owners.

There's money to be made out of managing strata blocks: recently Alliance Strata Management, perhaps Australia's largest strata management group, was sold reputedly for $3.8 million following a scandal involving licensing irregularities and alleged undisclosed commissions on placement of body corporate insurances worth millions of dollars. And though Alliance is subject to NSW laws requiring managers to be licensed and to have undertaken special studies, in most of the rest of Australia there are no such controls and the rules and responsibilities are left up to the players to decide. Anyone can set up in the strata management business, and that leaves consumers vulnerable to the quick-buck merchants. Really it's amazing there hasn't been a major sting yet.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF A STRATA MANAGING AGENT

The body corporate can pass all or some of its functions and responsibilities on to a managing agent (though in SA the agent can only 'assist' you to make your own decisions). Examples include:

- Arranging insurance such as fire, public liability, workers' compensation, common contents — including hall carpets, doors, shared laundry facilities.
- Keeping and maintaining the strata roll records.
- Handling requests for information by prospective unit buyers and sellers.
- Notifying unit owners of meetings.
- Preparing agenda for meetings.
- Chairing meetings.
- Arranging repairs and maintenance of common property.
- Collecting levies.
- Preparing a budget and any necessary tax return.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Whether as individuals or together (as the body corporate), unit owners have certain responsibilities. Key duties include:

- To obey the by-laws.
- To pay levies on time.
- To have an annual general meeting.
- To properly maintain and manage the common property for the benefit of the owners.
- To organise and maintain insurances.
- To indemnify the strata managing agent for costs and expenses properly incurred.

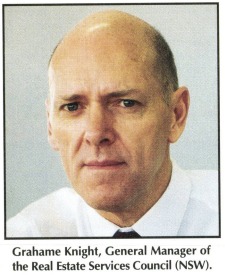
Strata title: the basics

The need to own a piece of land lies deep in the Australian psyche. And so a dilemma emerged in our legal system when people wanted to own a home up on the third floor with only a shared interest in the earth below.

Perhaps the best known pre-strata legal experiment is company title, where all unit owners became shareholders in the company which owned the site and building. But buying and selling a company title unit is a messy business involving the transfer of shares, unlike routine conveyancing. And no help could be found in the corporations law to regulate domestic disputes about pets, noise and nuisance neighbours. It needed a special, dedicated Act of Parliament.

In 1961 NSW brought out the first dedicated strata titles laws; all other states followed. But, as you might expect, they did things a little differently from each other.

A strata titles Act creates a **body corporate** (called the **strata company** in WA) to run the property. Though technically it is a company at law, it's relieved from the burden of having to follow the usual corporation laws. All unit owners



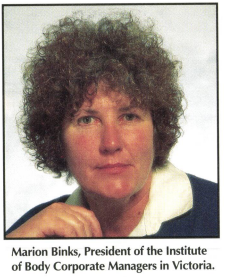
Grahame Knight, General Manager of the Real Estate Services Council (NSW).

"Bodies corporate and their councils should satisfy themselves regularly about the financial transactions required to be entered into on their behalf by the agent.

"They should also regularly satisfy themselves as to the currency of the managing agent's professional indemnity insurance cover.

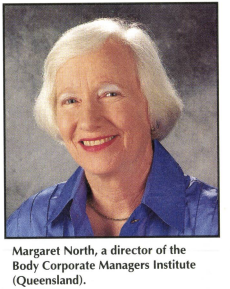
"Contracting strata managing services to an agent is not an opportunity for the council of the body corporate to abrogate its responsibilities regarding the strata plan. Individuals accepting such office would be well advised to take an active interest, as a principal, in the activities of the strata manager. It seems strata owners, bodies corporate and councils are well able to focus on the physical issues (maintenance, grounds care, etc) but would benefit from being just as diligent about the financial issues."

In NSW during 1993–94 the Real Estate Services Council received 83 complaints about strata managers. This represented nearly 9% of total complaints.



Marion Binks, President of the Institute of Body Corporate Managers in Victoria.

"Any commissions [from the placement of body corporate insurances] must be appropriately disclosed under relevant state and Commonwealth laws. Most managing agents receive insurance commissions as part of the fee structure. This commission contributes to lower management fees and is part of the total remuneration package of the managing agent."



Margaret North, a director of the Body Corporate Managers Institute (Queensland).

"The Body Corporate Managers Institute and the industry at large have for many years strongly requested the Queensland government to license body corporate managers. However, the government has now advised the industry that it does not intend to introduce licensing."

are automatically members of the body corporate, but there may be elected representatives (treasurer, secretary, chairperson) or a council/committee to manage the day-to-day affairs.

And what do you own exactly? The site is divided into units (called 'lots') and common property. The proprietor owns his or her unit up to a physical boundary which, in NSW, SA and WA, is the **inner surface** of the ceiling, walls and floor (or the mid-point of these barriers for strata blocks in the ACT, NT and Queensland). The position varies elsewhere.

The rest is common property, belonging to all owners, and the maintenance responsibility of the body corporate. However, there may also be a car space, garage, laundry, store room or garden space on the legal title to your unit. That means it's exclusively for your use. Check the strata plan and title deeds.

Each unit owner pays money into a fund for the upkeep of the common property — mowing the lawns, insuring the building, fixing broken gutters and so on. Your share is based on a figure called the **unit entitlement**, which is typically calculated by the value of the unit compared to the total development.

Pet hates

By-laws or regulations outline acceptable behaviour for unit owners. For example, generally you need the consent of the body corporate to keep a pet in your unit. In Victoria the situation is reversed: you can assume consent unless there is a rule to the contrary. Ask to see the by-laws or body corporate regulations before you buy into the block as there may be a rule against pets.

The strata laws regulate affairs by creating three levels of agreement. Most matters of common interest will be decided by a **simple majority** vote (over 50% of those votes present). More important issues — such as giving one unit an exclusive right to use a particular car space — may call for a **special resolution** where no more than 25% vote against it (or one-third in SA); sometimes changes will require that no-one present disagrees (**unanimous resolution**). The fine detail changes between the states, so you should get a copy of your state's strata titles Act if you want to be an active participant in the democratic process.

Getting professional help

Does your block of units need a strata managing agent? What you're paying for is convenience, impartiality and expertise that may not be available among the group of owners. Someone neutral can take the flak — chasing unpaid levies, moving out unauthorised pets, running meetings — and not have to live daily cheek-by-jowl with the consequences. It is a time and tact-consuming job and requires knowledge of the law and procedures. See *Responsibilities of a strata managing agent*, left, for more details of what the manager can do.

Officially, complaints seem to be few. Industry leaders talk about personality clashes with unit owners and delays in getting tasks done. The big messes and cases of financial misappropriation have come to light in NSW — and we think this may have something to do with there being a government watchdog in that state.

How to keep some control

How can you keep an eye on what the managing agent is (or isn't) doing? Here are some tactics to consider:

- Take the time to go to body corporate meetings and read all agendas and minutes carefully.
- Insist that meetings are minuted and copies circulated. Check that the managing agent has carried out instructions promptly and completely.
- Ask for quarterly written financial reports.
- Inspect the insurance policies each year on renewal. Have premiums been paid?
- Ask your treasurer or chairperson to go through the bank statement monthly and confirm each receipt and expenditure.
- You can inspect the managing agent's accounts and records for your strata plan. Get the prior approval of your chairperson as there are privacy concerns for other unit owners.
- You may prefer not to let the managing agent be a signatory to the body corporate accounts. Discuss this at a general meeting.
- Test out a new managing agent with a limited range of tasks before handing over more complete control.
- Set deadlines for the manager's tasks (such as getting a repair completed).
- Write a performance guarantee into your contract: see an example, right.

TAKEN ON TRUST

Last year, John King, a strata managing agent from Wollongong in NSW, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for stealing more than $130,000 from agency trust funds. According to the Real Estate Services Council, "King's solicitor said King's financial situation had got out of hand and that he had 'succumbed to financial pressures'. To this Judge Joseph Gibson QC remarked: 'Yes, Mr King succumbed and succumbed and succumbed. He started succumbing in February 1988 and continued through to 1992.'"

Room for reform

In states currently lacking comprehensive regulation of the strata management industry we would like to see these reforms take place:

- Strata managers should be licensed or, at the very least, there should be a more dynamic supervisory and investigatory role for a government agency in each state; information about the nature and extent of complaints should be made more available.
- It should be easier to know who handles complaints about strata managing agents — we found it difficult to see a clear pathway.
- Professional indemnity insurance should be a mandatory requirement for all strata managers. It should not be possible to trade without a satisfactory level of cover.
- There should be full disclosure of all commissions received by managers from placement of insurance and maintenance work.

PERFORMANCE GUARANTEE
L.J. HOOKER STRATA SERVICES S.A.
We believe so strongly that communication and getting the job done are central to the strata support service owners deserve that we guarantee our performance.
If you find we have failed to deliver we will refund your Corporation's fees:
✔ Telephone calls returned same day
✔ Correspondence answered same day
✔ Emergency maintenance actioned same day
✔ Ordinary maintenance actioned within 48 hours
✔ Programmed maintenance actioned within 21 days of agreed date
✔ Minutes of meetings posted to owners within 14 days of the meeting
1 weeks management fee if we fail to deliver on any of the above
Gordon Russell
Managing Director
7/94
L.J. Hooker Strata Services SA
1ST

Don't let your strata managing agent become lazy. Get a performance guarantee like this one written into your contract of appointment.

THE INS AND OUTS OF STRATA MANAGING AGENTS

If you don't want to look after the affairs of your block, you can appoint a professional to do it for you.

Before appointing a strata managing agent:

- See the government licence (NSW and NT only).
- See the current professional indemnity insurance (to cover negligence).
- Check out the agent's history with your consumer affairs or fair trading office, and with the Real Estate Institute in your state.

What can a managing agent do for my block of units?

The managing agent can carry out most of the tasks of the body corporate, including: collecting levies, calling meetings, paying insurance, organising maintenance and repairs of common property (see *Responsibilities of a managing agent* on page 30). Generally speaking they cannot delegate these tasks to someone else, nor can they make decisions for you; they are there to assist and to carry out the wishes of the body corporate or its council/committee.

Who can I complain to about the conduct of a strata managing agent?

If the manager is a licensed real estate agent you can take your problem to the Real Estate Institute. Otherwise, go to your local consumer affairs or fair trading office (ask about the government **strata titles referees** in Queensland and WA, who may also be of assistance in certain cases). In NSW there is also the Strata and Tenancy Commissioner and the Real Estate Services Council, together at last in the newly established Office of Real Estate Services.

Should there be a contract between us?

Definitely. In some states standard form contracts are widely used (NSW, Tasmania, Victoria and WA); many professional agents have their own versions. Don't sign a contract for a period longer than 12 months as it may prove difficult to get out earlier should you be dissatisfied. The contract should set out the tasks and remuneration, and specify any insurance or maintenance deals where the agent is getting a commission.

Is there a compensation fund?

The position is unsatisfactory throughout most of Australia as compensation funds only operate in NSW and the NT. And these only protect you in the case of **misappropriation** by the manager. If, for example, the manager fails to pay the premium for insuring the building you will only recover the premium, not compensation for the loss, in the event of a fire.

What does a managing agent charge?

Cost depends on the number and nature of tasks delegated. An average charge in most states is $100 per unit per year. It's likely to be less in the ACT (where there is a scale of minimum fees) and more in WA (where there is a scale of maximum fees) and NSW. Extras — like attending evening meetings or responding to requests from prospective unit purchasers — will cost extra.

Must the manager hold my levies 'on trust'?

Again, the only regulation is in NSW and the NT. Elsewhere you should ask to see evidence that the funds are either held in the agent's trust account with a financial institution, or otherwise banked in an account bearing your body corporate or strata plan name and number ('The Owners of Strata Plan No. xxxx').

Is there government regulation of strata managers?

Only in NSW and the NT must they be licensed — elsewhere anyone can set up in this job even with no qualifications or experience. Many managers, however, are licensed real estate agents as well.

How can I get a strata managing agent appointed?

In most states you appoint a manager by an ordinary resolution (simple majority vote) at a general meeting of the body corporate. In Victoria and Tasmania it might be the body corporate council/committee which makes the appointment.

How can I get the manager sacked?

In the same way as the appointment. The contract should set out the method and period of notice. Typically one month's notice is all that's required once the initial contract term has expired.

Christmas shopping spree

To help with some of your Chrissie shopping we've summarised most of our tests since last December into the next few pages. Consult the original reports if you want more information. Don't forget we've also got tests of compost bins on page 43, exterior door locks on page 7 and sparkling wines and champagne on page 19.

The prices given are a good target to aim for when shopping around; most are based on nationwide checks in September 1994. Products are listed in rank order.

ENTERTAINMENT

VIDEO GAMES (December 1993)

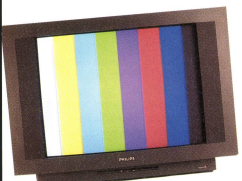
Video games are computer games for people without computers. The games come in cartridges (or compact discs in some systems) which are placed in a unit that is plugged into your television set. Like other computer technology, they're becoming more sophisticated all the time and this is measured by the speed of their processors: 16-bit processors are better than 8-bit while 24-bit and 32-bit will be better again.

We enlisted local schoolchildren as testers and found the most advanced systems (also the most expensive) were the most popular, with their higher-quality graphics and more levels of complexity within the games. Given the cost of the systems and the games, we advise you to check out what your child's friends have; if there's an overwhelming preference for a certain system, buy that so they can swap games around. Adventure games such as Super Mario and Sonic were the most popular with the people in our test.

WHAT TO BUY

	SEGA Mega-CD*	$599
	SNK Neo Geo	$599
equal	**NINTENDO** Super Nintendo	$199
equal	**SEGA** Mega Drive	$199

* If you don't have a Sega Mega Drive already you'll need to buy one to use with the Mega-CD.



TELEVISIONS (June 1994)

This time we tested the biggies, the 68 cm televisions, big enough to fit three sumo wrestlers or a political heavy across the screen with ease. Our panel of TV viewers liked all but one of the TVs in the test, while the Philips scored best overall because of its very good remote control and good sound quality.

When looking to buy any television, take some time in the shop to play around with the remote control. They're all quite different and you can save a lot of frustration if you find one that's easy to use.

WHAT TO BUY

	PHILIPS 29SX8676*	$2189
	SONY KV-2966AS	$1999
	MITSUBISHI CT-29AB1	$1799
equal	**PANASONIC** TC-29V26A	$1995
equal	**SAMSUNG** CB-7230WT	$1600

*The model tested was the 29SX8671 but the manufacturer says it has been upgraded to this technically similar model.

VIDEO RECORDERS (May 1994)

Over the last decade people have come to terms with using computers, faxes and microwave ovens, but programming the video to record something while you're not there still brings out the Luddite in many. Then there are the problems of setting the clock and tuning the channels in when you first get the machine home. You'd think the manufacturers would have sorted this out by now, but we found the major differences between the models we tested were still in their ease of use; picture quality was much the same on all of them.

The **AKAI** is the only one of our recommended models that hasn't been discontinued since the test report in May, and even it's had some cosmetic changes. The **SONY**, while not originally in our *What to buy* list, performed well and is worth considering although it was not quite as easy to use as some other models.

WHAT TO BUY

	AKAI VS-G405*	$549
	SONY SLV-X37	$599

* The model tested was the VS-G40, but Akai says it has been superseded by the technically similar VS-G405.

COMMUNICATIONS

MOBILE PHONES (August 1994)

If you're thinking of buying a mobile phone you're probably wondering whether to choose analogue or digital. Digital phones are definitely the way of the future, but if you need a mobile right now an analogue phone is still probably the best choice (because of competitive prices and the more extensive network) if you don't mind forking out for a digital model in a few years' time. At the moment the analogue network offers the best coverage, but the government is planning to shut it down by 2000 in favour of the newer digital network.

We tested six analogue mobile phones and found the biggest difference between them is apparent when you try to make calls in weak reception conditions. The top models kept going strongly, while others foundered like hapless water buffalo. We also looked at how easy they were to use and how well they handled different signal strengths during a call.

WHAT TO BUY

	NEC Sportz	$599
equal	**OPTUS** Sportz*	$573
	TELECOM Sportz*	$570
	MOTOROLA 9660 Ultra Sleek*	$469
equal	**OPTUS** 9660*	$460
	TELECOM Walkabout 4H	$499

* The NEC Sportz (tested) is technically the same as the Telecom Sportz and the Optus Sportz. The Telecom Walkabout 4H (tested) is technically the same as the Motorola 9660 Ultra Sleek and the Optus 9660. Prices are for a phone with two batteries.

KITCHEN

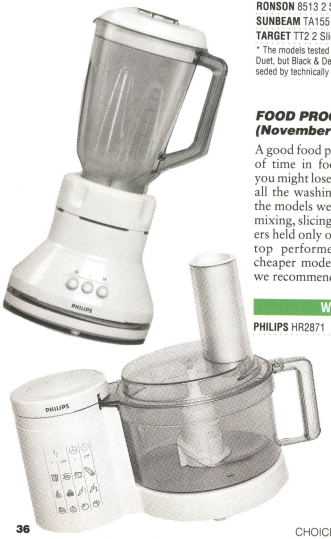
BLENDERS (January 1994)

When you're on a good thing, stick to it. Blenders have undergone very few design changes in the last 40 years: they still look much the same, and when we tested a 1950s blender with this new batch it performed just as well as the modern ones. One modern feature which does seem practical is a pulse button, which is useful for heavy foods. Having a number of different speeds didn't make much difference at all to performance.

Before you buy a blender, try out the controls for ease of use. Pull it apart. Will it be easy to clean and put back together? We found they were all fine for processing soft foods, but the recommended models were also good at harder foods like nuts, parmesan cheese and ice.

WHAT TO BUY

PHILIPS HR-2817	$70
BREVILLE BLR-1	$55
BREVILLE BLR-2	$60



TOASTERS (March 94)

"Everyone knows the best toaster ever produced was that silver one your folks got at their engagement. Who cares if getting within six feet of one with metal cutlery in your hand is likely to result in death? They cook toast nicely and they're still working 25 years later on."

The students of Monash University may have lampooned our toaster test this year, but if you're looking for a toaster that browns your toast evenly and does so consistently at the same setting, the ones listed below were the best in our test. They differ as to their extra features such as cool outer wall, built-in safety switch, crumpet-friendliness and easily cleaned crumb tray.

THE BEST

In alphabetical order

BLACK & DECKER ET23 Two Up*	$25
BLACK & DECKER ET24 Two Up*	$25
BLACK & DECKER ET28 Duet*	$31
BLACK & DECKER ET29 Duet*	$35
BLACK & DECKER ET50 Smart Toast	$50
BREVILLE BT700 Thick 'n' Thin	$55
PHILIPS HD4580 Electronic	$37
RONSON 8513 2 Slice	$27
SUNBEAM TA155 Quartzline	$50
TARGET TT2 2 Slice	$29

* The models tested were the ET23 Two Up and the ET28 Duet, but Black & Decker tells us they have been superseded by technically similar models, the ET24 and ET29.

FOOD PROCESSORS (November 1994)

A good food processor can save you a lot of time in food preparation (although you might lose it again in some cases with all the washing-up they need). Some of the models we tested had problems with mixing, slicing and shredding, while others held only one cup of liquid. Since our top performer was also one of the cheaper models tested it's the only one we recommended.

WHAT TO BUY

PHILIPS HR2871	$89

HOUSEHOLD

CLOTHES DRYERS (February 1994)

Since February when this report was published, our top-ranking clothes dryer has been discontinued. This has happened with a few of our tests, but the clothes dryer is worth a mention because it ran on gas and easily outperformed the electric dryers in speed of drying and energy efficiency. (Note that this calculation was weighted to reflect the fact that, in producing a certain amount of energy from burning gas, you produce less carbon dioxide than you do burning coal to make the equivalent amount of electricity).

That said, however, all the electric models performed quite well and choosing between them is probably a matter of which features you want (such as reverse tumbling, drying rack or option to duct to the outside) or which design you like, rather than performance.

WHAT TO BUY

	SIMPSON Maxidry 457*	$329
	HOOVER Apollo 421	$299
	FISHER & PAYKEL Dualcare AD53-U	$369
equal	**FISHER & PAYKEL** Multi-temp Auto Sensing ED54-U	$455
	HOOVER Apollo Supreme	$410
	SIMPSON Autosensing 512*	$469

* The models tested were the Maxidry 1200S and the Autosensing 1350SR; Simpson says they have been superseded by the technically similar models listed above.

IRONS (May 1994)

The requirements for a good iron are pretty simple: they should be light and comfortable to use, they should have a smooth soleplate and a groove to manoeuvre around buttons. Some of the models we tested have an automatic cut-off feature to stop you burning down the house if you wander away from the ironing and forget to turn it off. Another had an 'energy saver' feature, although the amount it would save seemed hardly worthwhile. However, our results are based on our trialists' judgment of how well each iron got creases and wrinkles out of different fabrics, plus the ease and comfort of using the irons.

WHAT TO BUY

	PHILIPS Comfort Plus 210 HD 1512	$70
equal	**SUNBEAM** Pro-steam 310	$57
	SUNBEAM Pro-steam 315	$70
	BRAUN 5000 Super PV52	$80
	BLACK & DECKER Ultra Steam 2000 IR60	$83

VACUUM CLEANERS (July 1994)

As usual, the two upright vacuum cleaners in this test of cleaners under $200 were far superior to anything else we tested. Where the other types picked up around 10% to 30% of the dirt we rubbed into our carpets, the upright models got 60% to 70% out. However, because upright models can be difficult to manoeuvre into tight spaces and some people simply don't like them, the top barrel and canister vacuum cleaners have also been included in our list.

WHAT TO BUY

	UPRIGHT	
	EUREKA Bravo The Boss AU9334	$219
	HOOVER Lark U1318	$199
	BARREL or CANISTER	
equal	**HITACHI** Super CV-4700	$199
	HITACHI CV-99*	$188
equal	**HITACHI** CV-2500	$159
	PANASONIC MC-2750	$170

* The CV-99 is a canister (vertical barrel) cleaner; the other three are horizontal barrel models.

PEDESTAL FANS (October 1994)

A good fan has a large range of air movement between its highest and lowest settings, and in this test we found one that comes fairly close to ideal in this regard. The OMEGA listed below could produce anything from a gentle night breeze to a fierce blast. It was also one of the quietest, and the only one with a grille that made it impossible for someone to push their fingers through and risk touching the blades. Its only disadvantage is its price tag — around $40 more than most of the other recommended 40 cm fans.

We tested two sizes of fan, 30 cm and 40 cm. The 30 cm models gave a much weaker breeze than the 40 cm ones and only one is really worth considering.

WHAT TO BUY

40 cm FANS	
OMEGA 40 cm with remote	$99
AIRMASTER TPA-4093	$50
LINDA LFP78 Island Breeze 93	$60
MARTEC MA 40PD	$57
30 cm FANS	
BONAIRE 0330007	$39

SAFETY SWITCHES (May 1994)

There are several different types of safety switch. We tested the plug type, which you wire onto an appliance in place of the original plug, and the adaptor type, which you plug your appliance into and then plug into a power point. There are also types which fit onto your main switchboard, ones that replace an existing power point, and the board type which plugs into a power point and has a number of sockets for plugging different appliances in at the same time.

The disturbing thing about the switches we tested was that only two out of 10 met all our rigorous safety and performance expectations (one of these has since been discontinued). Six of them failed even basic performance tests. Safety switches won't protect you in all cases, but they should perform better than most of the ones we tested.

WHAT TO BUY

HPM 5100 (plug type)	$40

FAN HEATERS (June 1994)

For this test we looked at fan heaters with a thermostat, priced under $100. The heaters tested are sufficient for a small room, but will be going flat out to little effect if the room is too big or you leave the door open.

Heaters with thermostats switch on and off automatically to try and keep a constant temperature; sometimes this isn't effective and the rising and falling temperature is quite noticeable. We therefore made consistency of temperature the major factor in our recommendations. Other factors were noise, ease of use and how hot the grille got.

WHAT TO BUY

SUNGLO Laser 2400	$40
HOMEMAKER 2400	$30

WASHING MACHINES (September/November 1994)

After 30-odd years of testing washing machines using hot or warm water, we finally decided to break the ice and do a cold water test. This isn't an idle whim. More and more people are washing their clothes in cold water. They find the results don't differ significantly enough, especially for darker colours, while the cost is significantly less because less energy is used.

For our first cold water report we looked at all the models priced under $1200, which is the bulk of the market in Australia. Our tests are based on a number of factors: most important is how well they clean, but we also looked at energy and water efficiency, how well they spin and how gentle they are.

Front loaders are generally gentler and use less water, while top loaders are usually faster and you can add clothes to the wash mid-cycle; both types in this price range seem to clean clothes equally well. The differences in price between similar models of the same brand are due to their having different features and settings.

WHAT TO BUY

	FRONT LOADERS	
	WHIRLPOOL AWG 384	$1080
	ADMIRAL 700	$960
equal	**HOOVER** 550	$960
	HOOVER 555	$1020
equal	**IGNIS** AWL305	$900
	OMEGA 505-2	$990
	WHIRLPOOL AWG 354	$950
	TOP LOADERS	
	FISHER & PAYKEL 601	$1000
equal	**FISHER & PAYKEL** 701	$1100
	HITACHI PAF-1260PX	$940
	FISHER & PAYKEL 501/051	$900/810
equal	**ADMIRAL** 510	$590
	HITACHI PAF 1220P	$870

CHILDREN

BABY MONITORS (November 1994)

Baby monitors are simple intercom systems with a transmitter near the baby and a receiver near you, so if you're out of earshot you can still hear if the baby cries. They're not intended to be monitors of the baby's health and are no substitute for parental supervision. They rely on the baby crying if he or she is in trouble, you being in range of the signal and the power supply not failing. Most of the models tested have portable receivers which you can carry around with you; there are also non-portable units that need to be plugged into power points.

Features we found useful were indicators that tell you if you're out of range of the transmitter or the battery is running low, and a visual display that lights up when your baby makes a noise. Our performance tests covered a range of distances and obstacles between the transmitter and receiver, and showed up some big differences between models.

WHAT TO BUY

PORTABLE MODELS (battery-operated)

REALISTIC FM Cordless Room Monitor 43-202A $80

BABYCOM Two-way Nursery Monitor 6200 $100

BABYCOM Mobile 5730-AD $80

NON-PORTABLE MODELS (mains-operated)

SHIMASU FM Baby/Room Monitor F1401 $50

STROLLERS (August 1994)

Umbrella strollers are light and can be folded into a long, narrow shape not unlike an umbrella — hence their name. They're a far cry from the old-fashioned prams that were built like tanks and impossible to get onto public transport or into the boot of a car.

However, we do have concerns about the safety of some umbrella strollers in our test and believe they shouldn't be used until the baby is at least six months old. The models in our test didn't have safe barriers at the top of their seats; when the seat is reclined and the stroller tipped back, a small baby can slip out. A stroller should have a full five-point safety harness (two shoulder straps, two waist straps and a crotch strap), which should fit snugly around the baby.

We also had concerns about the durability of some of these strollers. Five of the 10 models tested suffered an unacceptable level of damage during testing (which included a user trial as well as a durability test) so they weren't recommended. The **MACLAREN Tourer** was the top scorer in our test, but it's much more expensive than the others and several considerably cheaper models were also judged to be good.

WHAT TO BUY

MACLAREN Tourer $185*

BABYCO Aspley $100

equal **MOTHER'S CHOICE** Holiday $139

equal **STEELCRAFT** Arcade $125

MOTHER'S CHOICE Kent $119

* Price does not include hood, which will cost you about an extra $75.

OUTDOORS

COMPACT BINOCULARS (March 1994)

Binoculars are always described by two numbers, such as 7x50 or 10x25. The first number is the magnification, while the second is the diameter in millimetres of the objective lenses (the bigger ones). Greater magnification increases the detail you can see but also makes it harder to keep the image steady, as any jitteriness in your hands is also magnified. Bigger objective lenses let in more light, making it easier to see things at night or when the light is poor — so before you buy, consider what you want to use them for, and definitely try them out.

We tested compact binoculars, which are lighter than standard models but have smaller objective lenses. We have separated our recommendations into 8x magnification and 10x; 8x binoculars are easier to use, but 10x sell more (presumably on the 'bigger is better' theory).

WHAT TO BUY

8x MAGNIFICATION

equal **BAUSCH & LOMB** Legacy 8x24 $290

equal **NIKON** 8x23 CFIII $235

equal **GERBER** 8x23 ZCF $180

equal **PENTAX** 8x24 UCFIII $220

10x MAGNIFICATION

NIKON 10x25 CFIII $265

equal **MINOLTA** 10x23 $289

equal **PENTAX** 10x24 UCFIII $240

SOLAR CAMPING LAMP (October 1994)

The set-up consists of a lamp, a battery and a solar panel; the theory is that the battery charges during the day and runs the light at night. The light isn't as bright as an ordinary house light but we found it fine for reading and writing, and if the battery is fully charged it will give you almost 12 hours of use on the high setting. However, on a cloudy testing day the cell could only produce enough electricity for one hour of light on the high setting.

Given the lamp's current high purchase price ($295) you might worry about the risk of the solar panel being stolen, as it has to be left out during the day to work, but with its minimal running costs and environmental benefits the **MAGIC LANTERN** is worth a serious look.

CHAINSAWS (July 1994)

When the dust cleared after the Bermagui chainsaw massacre, the casualty toll included two years' worth of firewood and a few dud chainsaws. However, our testers came back unscathed, and they found a few good chainsaws into the bargain.

We tested electric and petrol chainsaws and were surprised to find the best electric chainsaws were just as good as the best petrol ones. The electric models were generally easier to use, being a bit lighter, quieter, virtually vibration-free and much easier to start. The disadvantage was the power cord, but provided some common sense is used it isn't a great problem. We'd also recommend using a safety switch with all power tools — see page 37.

WHAT TO BUY

	PETROL SAWS	
	JONSERED 2036 Turbo	$480
	HUSQVARNA 36	$469
	STIHL 009	$445
	ELECTRIC SAWS	
equal	**HUSQVARNA** 1200	$315
equal	**JONSERED** 2015 EL	$320
	OLEO-MAC E 140 F	$299

LINE TRIMMERS (October 1994)

You might call them 'whipper-snippers' but that's a trade name so we can't. Line trimmers have a handle at the top with controls, and a long shaft. At the bottom is a cutting head which spins a length of nylon line at high speed, chopping down grass and weeds in the places most mowers can't reach. They're not a good substitute for a lawnmower because they don't produce even grass unless you're highly skilled at it, but they do clean up the edges when you're mowing.

We tested 12 electric line trimmers and found big differences in performance. The good trimmers cut a swath through heavily overgrown grass, while some were pushing to cut through dandelions. Our top scorer, the **RYOBI**, was not only the best performer but also the easiest to use. Even though it was the heaviest in the test, its balanced design makes it much less tiring to use than some of the lighter models. The **BLACK & DECKER** has a particularly good line feed mechanism.

WHAT TO BUY

RYOBI RCT 525A MKII	$140
BLACK & DECKER GL620	$135

CARS

CAR CD PLAYERS (January 1994)

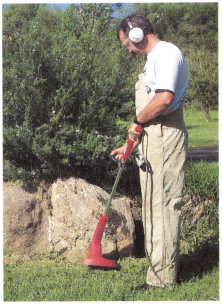
Putting a compact disc player into your car won't give you the same crystal-clear sound quality you're used to at home. There's the car noise to contend with, plus the inside of your car isn't necessarily designed for hifi sound, and you're limited ultimately by the quality of your car radio and speakers. However, there is a convenience aspect to consider. Multi-disc car CD players hold six or 10 discs, which can give you many hours of music at your fingertips with all the choices of a standard CD player, such as selecting particular tracks, playing tracks in random order, etc.

The players we tested have a unit in the boot which holds the discs. This is connected to the FM band of your car radio via a modulator, which in some cases you have to buy separately. We made ease of use the most important factor in our assessment because you don't want to spend too much time trying to operate the controls while you're driving. We also tried them out on dirt roads to see whether this made the music jump around excessively, but there were no real problems in this regard.

WHAT TO BUY

	SANYO FXD-C200* (CDM-200 modulator)	$749
equal	**BELTEK** MDC-1000	$799
equal	**SANYO** FXD-C100 (CDM-100R modulator)	$899

* Sanyo says this model has been superseded by a technically similar model, the FXD-C222, but we still found the FXD-C200 when we did our price check in September; the FXD-C222 was not available in stores for us to price at that time.



STEERING WHEEL LOCKS (January 1994)

The theory goes that a steering wheel lock will deter car thieves enough to make them move on to someone else's car instead. Our testers aren't accomplished thieves, but they removed 14 of the 15 locks in this test in under a minute each — some in less than five seconds and some bare-handed. This result — and the fact that a group of schoolchildren visiting our labs could tell us how to defeat many of them — made us somewhat sceptical about their claimed deterrence factor.

The good news is that one lock withstood all our attempts to defeat it. It proves the point we've made in previous tests that, with more thought put into the design by the manufacturer, a lock can be produced that is more than just a visual deterrent. What's more, it costs much the same as the dud locks in our test.

WHAT TO BUY

AUNGER Pro Lock APL-1020	$43

Compost bins: closing the cycle

To produce nutrient-rich compost, you no longer need an untidy and possibly smelly heap surrounded by flies at the bottom of the garden; composting containers now come in many shapes and sizes. Here we explain the principles behind composting, and on page 43 we report on our tests of six compost bins.

COMPOSTING MAKES SENSE — ecologically and economically. Why throw out waste that can be converted — at little cost — into a nutrient-rich fertiliser? In your garden you can use it on flower and vegetable beds, around shrubs and trees, as a top dressing for lawns and for pot plants. To benefit plants and earth, compost doesn't have to be dug deep into the soil — though you can do that if you have sufficient top soil and are creating a new vegetable or flower bed. In an established garden, just spread it 5-10 cm thick onto the top soil. It will protect plants from moisture loss, slowly release nutrients into the soil and attract earthworms.

Of course, composting household and garden waste also eases the overall waste disposal problem. In Australia garden and food waste constitutes about half of all household waste. To limit the amount that ends up as landfill, many local councils are encouraging residents to compost organic household waste and provide free compost bins or sell them at a subsidised price. A wide variety of types and sizes is also available through retail outlets and by mail order.

In waste management and health circles, however, there's concern that too little information is available to both local governments and consumers about the compost containers currently available, how they perform and how to make good-quality compost. That's why the Western Australia Office of Waste Management proposed a joint test, funded by the WA Government, CHOICE and the Perth Western Metropolitan Regional Council.

At Murdoch University the Institute of Environmental Science developed a test program and, in collaboration with CHOICE, over six months tested two models each of three different types of composter — tumblers, aerobic and anaerobic bins. All three types are widely available around Australia. They all have different features and the ones we tested range in capacity from 150 to 280 L. For that amount of waste — and the pile of compost it generates — you'd probably need a two or more person household and a garden.

If your main aim is to reduce food waste rather than to produce compost, you could try a GREEN CONE (see opposite). It's designed primarily as a disposal unit for household food waste and only produces small amounts of compost, but then, it's not promoted as a compost maker and it does break down the waste to a fraction of its original volume. Or you could try your luck farming worms and let them convert your organic household waste and small amounts of garden waste into vermicompost. Worm farms come in various sizes suitable for small or larger households; more about them overleaf.

How composting works

Home composting — in heaps, enclosures or special containers — imitates, under accelerated conditions, the natural recycling process that occurs on the forest floor where leaves, twigs, grass and loose earth form a natural protective layer for delicate plant roots. Over time this mulch decays and turns into a nutrient-rich soil conditioner, or compost.

The composting process consists of four different stages — incubation, 'hot', cooling and maturation — during which thousands of organisms including bacteria and fungi, and heat, moisture and oxygen convert organic matter to earthy, crumbly compost.

The first stage lasts for about 24 hours, during which the temperature in the bin, tumbler or heap rises to 25-45°C. In the second phase the composting matter heats up further: a temperature of 55°C is ideal as this will kill most pathogens and weed seeds. If it gets too hot the bacteria won't survive, and they're necessary for the decomposition of large plant molecules. To speed up the composting process, it's essential to keep the air moving through the waste matter.

After about two to three weeks the 'half-cooked' compost starts cooling down and provides the right conditions for other micro-organisms to continue the breakdown process. It's still too 'sharp' for

most plants and needs more time to mature — at least three to four weeks ideally, during which the microbes will further decompose larger compounds.

Four principles for perfect compost

Unless you let your compost dry out the organic waste will break down, no matter how you treat it. But to turn composting into a pleasurable gardening activity and gain a fertiliser you can use without holding your nose, you should observe a few principles.

■ **Keep your compost moist.** Too little moisture will halt the decomposition process; too much, however, may slow the process and lead to fermentation and a foul smell. Ideally the moisture content should be about 40 to 60% — about the consistency of a lightly wrung sponge. Most composting materials such as food scraps or fresh lawn clippings are rich in moisture. Adding these in cool or damp weather conditions will probably keep the moisture level high enough (in fact you may even need to add dry material to stop the contents becoming so wet that anaerobic — no oxygen — conditions develop); in dry and hot conditions you may have to add water.

■ **Keep your compost well aerated.** Composting is an aerobic process — it needs oxygen. You can produce nutritious compost in anaerobic conditions as well, but its consistency and smell are often compromised and it takes much longer. Turning the composting materials regularly in a tumbler or lifting a bin occasionally and forking the contents back into it will help aeration, speed up the process and improve the even consistency of the compost.

■ **Feed the micro-organisms in your compost the right mixture of organic matter** (see *What to put in*, right). The bacteria, fungi and protozoa which help decompose organic matter are naturally present in healthy soil. They're activated in favourable conditions and will thrive in the right mixture of nutrients. A proper blend of ingredients will also help the compost generate and maintain the temperature it needs to kill pathogens and weed and grass seeds.

■ **Keep all waste materials small or shredded.** This will speed up the composting process. Newspapers and garden prunings should be torn or broken into small pieces. For bigger gardens and larger amounts of prunings, a shredder or mulcher might come in handy. We'll report on some models next month.

What to put in ...

Some of the materials commonly composted are high in nitrogen and moisture, such as green plant materials, fruit peelings, vegetable scraps, fresh lawn clippings, manure, garden weeds and seaweed. Carbon-rich materials include dry leaves, twiggy prunings, sawdust, paper, straw, dry grass and wood ash, which are all fairly low in moisture. All these materials are or were once part of a plant. That's generally a good indication that they're suitable for composting. There are a few exceptions, of course; we've listed them below. You can also add other wastes such as coffee grounds and tea leaves or teabags (only the staple won't decompose).

To produce a nutritious compost, a variety of ingredients has to be added, containing the right amounts of nitrogen and carbon — both are required by the microbes at work in your compost. The optimum carbon to nitrogen (C:N) ratio in the composting matter is 25-30 to 1. If it contains too much nitrogen (so the C:N ratio is too low), it will produce unpleasant ammonia vapours which may attract flies. Too little nitrogen relative to carbon (a too high C:N ratio) can slow down or stop the composting process and create a nitrogen demand in the surrounding soil. To help you select the right mixture of nutrients, we've listed in the table below a few commonly composted waste materials and their C:N ratio. The lower the ratio, the higher the nitrogen content; the higher the ratio, the higher the carbon content.

Material	C:N Ratio
Chicken manure	8:1
Food waste	15:1
Cattle manure	20:1
Weeds	20:1
Lawn clippings	20:1
Leaves (dead)	70:1
Straw (mulched)	100:1
Paper (torn/shredded newspaper)	170:1
Sawdust (untreated)	450:1

Source: Kevin Handreck, *Gardening down-under*, CSIRO, 1993.

... and what to leave out

■ Meat, fish and fat. Although suitable for composting, these may attract vermin, cats, dogs and insects, and may present a health risk if not properly covered.

THE GREEN CONE

If gardening isn't one of your favourite pastimes, you can still minimise your food waste with a **GREEN CONE**. It's promoted as a disposal unit for food waste, not as a compost maker, and isn't designed for the material created to be easily removed, as it is sealed with screws. Because it's not really comparable with the compost bins tested we tried one out separately, to see just how effective it was.

In four months, the waste added to it had shrunk to a quarter of its original weight and to a fraction of its original volume. That sounds pretty good to us. We 'fed' the **GREEN CONE** twice a week with 3 kg or more of cooked and raw food waste and 10 g of Green Cone Accelerator, according to the manufacturer's instructions. At the end of our set four-month filling period, when the unit was only a third full, we'd added a total of 117 kg, which had reduced to 29 kg — a 75% reduction.

The Green Cone reduces food waste to a fraction of its original weight and volume. As it has to be buried in soil, it's not suitable for a verandah or balcony.

Over a further two-month period, during which we left the **GREEN CONE** without adding further waste, the weight had decreased by another 5%. However, a much better result could possibly have been achieved if the weather had been on our side. Just as we had to cope with hot and dry conditions during the compost bin test, heavy rains and storms disrupted the **GREEN CONE** trial and washed sand and water into it, which artificially increased the weight of its contents.

Overall we can say the **GREEN CONE** performed well as a food waste disposal unit. Filled to capacity — which would take about a year at the rate we added materials — and in more favourable weather conditions, it would probably reduce the amount of waste even more than it did in our test.

■ Glossy paper magazines. Shredded or torn newspaper is OK, though. It's a good source of carbon and absorbs moisture.
■ Human faeces. They may harbour disease-causing bacteria and create a health hazard.
■ Diseased plant material or plants and weeds killed with herbicides.
■ Vacuum cleaner dust, which tends to be high in heavy metals.

Should you add more?

Some compost bin manufacturers recommend adding layers of soil and/or alkaline additives such as dolomite, lime or ground limestone to create more favourable conditions and speed up the composting process. These additives are not essential to produce a nutritious fertiliser. Whether your compost needs them depends on the materials you're composting and the soil you want to use it on.

■ **Soil.** Adding layers of good, crumbly loam soil (which contains the right mixture of organic matter, clay and sand) can improve compost. It can positively influence the even distribution of moisture, encourage earthworms and microorganisms, increase air flow and prevent nitrogen loss. Soil can also help separate organic materials such as damp leaves, which might otherwise form a solid, impervious layer and restrict aeration.

On the other hand, soils with too much clay, coarse sand or acids will not benefit the compost at all. If the soil is too heavy and sticky it might even hamper good compost production; it could compact the ingredients and restrict the air flow. While soil introduces desirable micro-organisms into the compost, you generally don't have to add them. If required, manure or ready-made compost should introduce more micro-organisms into the compost.

■ **Alkaline additives such as lime, dolomite or ground limestone.** As with soil, the benefit of adding these substances to compost is debatable. They'll speed up ammonia production in the compost in the early stages and make it less acidic. However, the process is generally quite alkaline if a good mix of waste is used. If your compost is high in nitrogen, or you add soil which you know is acidic, adding lime might benefit it. Keep in mind, though, that alkalis will modify the pH balance of the compost and in turn the acidity of the soil you'll add it to.

The addition of soil and/or alkaline substances may be beneficial, but can also create problems. Neither form of additive is essential and we wanted to keep the process as simple as possible, so we carried out our tests without soil or alkaline additives and still produced good-quality compost in all the containers.

WORM FARMING

Apart from recycling your organic household waste into a rich natural fertiliser, a worm farm will provide you with an ever increasing number of worms (a plus for the keen angler). The fertiliser will be mainly in liquid form, but there'll also be some solid waste, or vermicompost.

Worm farms come in various sizes suitable for small gardens or larger properties. To find out how well they work and how easy they are to use, we convinced two volunteers from our staff to try their luck as worm farmers. We bought a **GARDENER** worm farm from Aus-Worm Organics for one volunteer and asked another, who'd already purchased a **RELN WORM FACTORY** from a local council, to tell us about her experiences.

Every week or two, Jenni can tap off about 2 L of liquid worm castings collected in the tray of the Gardener worm farm. She usually keeps the farm in the shade in her car port.

Both models had to be assembled but came with easy-to-understand assembly and operating instructions. The **GARDENER** is oval-shaped and consists of two chambers next to each other. When you've filled one chamber, you start on the second one and remove the dividing panel; when there's no food left to convert in the first, the worms will migrate into the second. In the **RELN WORM FACTORY**, the worms go through their food on a bottom tray and migrate upwards into two more trays stacked on top of each other. Both models stand on a drip tray fitted with a tap for easy removal of liquid fertiliser.

Both volunteers were fairly happy with the new additions to their households. Since they started operating the farms less than a year ago, both have been able to harvest regular quantities of liquid fertiliser for use in pot plants and around the garden. But as yet, neither has any vermicompost. According to John Andersen of Aus-Worm Organics, if you operate a farm the size of the **GARDENER**, 500 worms might take three to four months to get through one chamber, while 5000 would convert the same amount of waste in as little as three weeks. You don't have to add more worms than you first introduce to the farm; they're supposed to double in numbers roughly every two to three months. "Be patient and let them breed," said Mr Andersen. "After all, it's a worm farm."

It didn't quite work out for the 250 g of worms Christine Shaday first bought for her **RELN WORM FACTORY**. A few weeks after introducing them into the farm, Christine noticed the food scraps she first put in were rotting. She took a closer look through the compost but found no worms, so she contacted the place where she'd bought them.

There she learned that worms have a tendency to leave if they don't like their new environment. She was told they don't like acidic food wastes such as orange peel and onions. Another helpful tip was to place layers of wet newspaper on the bottom of the tray and on top of the waste and worms to stop them from leaving.

Worm farms are also available by mail order. They're best placed in a shady and sheltered spot in your garden, shed or car port but some are small enough for a verandah or balcony.

COMPOST BINS: THE TEST

All the bins we tested turned organic waste into good soil-conditioning compost, but some produced sweet-smelling, crumbly earth, others more smelly, wet layers.

AEROBIC BINS

Aerobic compost bins are designed to improve the air flow to the waste matter through ventilation holes or gaps in their construction. This means aerobic (oxygen-loving) bacteria flourish and help heat up the compost matter, so they're best placed in the shade where it can't get too hot and destroy desired micro-organisms.

The **RELN** bin, used widely and available through many local councils, is made from 100% recycled plastic — about a third of the material comes from recycled plastic $5 and $10 notes. With its numerous ventilation holes in the side panels and in the lid, this design is prone to dehydration and so is best suited to humid or cool and damp conditions.

While the ventilation holes are good for aeration, they also tend to allow water loss, which may dry out the compost in certain conditions. We tested the bins for six months in WA during the summer and autumn months; the moisture content of the compost repeatedly fell too low and halted the decomposition process, and we had to add a lot of water to compensate. The **AUSSIE ROTTER** bin, with only eight ventilation holes covered with mesh, had similar problems with moisture loss. If you use these bins in hot and dry conditions, we recommend you add at least 1 L of water twice a week to the **RELN** and half that amount to the **AUSSIE ROTTER** to compensate for the moisture loss.

Another disadvantage of aeration holes is that they tend to attract flies. We found more flies around the aerobic bins and tumblers than around the anaerobic bins we tested.

ANAEROBIC BINS

People who are looking for a low-maintenance bin or who don't want to spend too much time keeping the conditions right in their compost are better off with anaerobic bins. In anaerobic conditions (that is, predominantly without oxygen) organic waste materials will still decompose with the help of anaerobic bacteria, but the process takes longer, especially in cool and damp climates. In these conditions compost in anaerobic bins will benefit from the addition of dry materials, such as shredded or torn newspaper, to absorb moisture.

Rotating the Rapid Tumbler to keep the maturing compost aerated during our test in W.A.

Anaerobic bins are particularly suitable for hot and dry conditions, because their design — without special aeration holes — is best for moisture retention.

On the downside, the decaying process in anaerobic bins may produce a strong, foul smell due to the lack of oxygen and the production of ammonia and organic acids. You'll hardly notice the smell with the lid closed, but you will once you open it to add material! However, the end product in our anaerobic bins only retained a slight smell, and was of similar soil-conditioning quality to the crumbly, earthy-smelling compost produced in aerated conditions.

Although you can produce compost in anaerobic bins without mixing or turning the waste materials, occasional aeration will aid the process. Micro-organisms generate heat in the compost, and the more active anaerobic and aerobic bacteria the better. Among the models we tested, only the **AURORA** had problems maintaining heat. During the hot phase (see *How composting works* on page 40), the compost in this bin didn't quite reach the temperature necessary for the destruction of pathogens and weed seeds.

Because of these problems, anaerobic bins are best placed in a sunny position where they can absorb as much of the sun's radiation as possible to heat the compost and speed up the process.

We should point out that the manufacturer of the **GEDYE** bin claims soil and other substances should be added, and that this would have ensured a different product. We didn't include soil or other additives in any model because we don't consider them to be essential (see *Should you add more?* on page 42 for more details). We wanted to keep our tests simple and consistent and the results comparable across models of bin.

TUMBLERS

Tumblers are particularly suitable for households with large amounts of garden waste. If filled according to instructions and rotated daily, they can produce mulch in about a fortnight; mature compost may need another eight to 10 weeks. Placed in the shade they're suitable for virtually any climatic conditions.

Maturing compost in tumblers should be rotated daily, which speeds up the decomposition process, as heat is

more evenly distributed in a well aerated mixture. We tested two models of tumbler — the RAPID COMPOST TUMBLER, which can be rotated through its longitudinal centre like rolling a barrel, and the TUMBLEWEED Mulch Maker, which is turned in a head-over-heels fashion.

Both models are closed and high enough off the ground to keep vermin out. Compared with the TUMBLEWEED, the RAPID COMPOST TUMBLER was much easier to operate. It has a handle at the side for easy rotation; three metal rods inside further mix and aerate the compost when it's being turned; and it stands high enough to fit a wheelbarrow underneath — a plus if you have a big property and want to transport the compost to the other end of the garden. All these advantages, however, come at a price. At $255, the RAPID COMPOST TUMBLER was the most expensive model we tested. It also weighed the most — about 10 kg more than the other tumbler. The design is pretty stable, but you need two people to move it even when empty.

The TUMBLEWEED Mulch Maker's upright cylinder shape takes up less room, which is useful for a smaller garden, but we found it harder to turn a cylinder head-over-heels than to roll a barrel, especially when the weight was distributed unevenly in a half-full tumbler. Because the opening is fairly close to the ground, the compost has to be emptied onto the ground and then forked into a wheelbarrow for transportation, or into the lid or a garbage bag.

As with the aerobic bins, the moisture content in both tumblers dropped in the hot and dry conditions where we tested. Although the RAPID COMPOST TUMBLER's instructions didn't suggest adding water, we added some to both models and fixed the problem. If you're using one in such a climate, reduce the amount of dry material added.

Cheap composting

Making the best out of your kitchen and garden waste doesn't require an expensive bin or tumbler. A traditional compost heap or an enclosure made from chicken wire, bricks, railway sleepers or bales of hay may all produce good compost, as long as they're sheltered from excessive rain and sunshine. But these options don't look as tidy as a closed bin, they may attract flies, other insects or vermin, and may not be permitted by some health departments.

You could even make your own compost tumbler from an old 44 gallon drum. If you're not such a handyperson, do-it-yourself conversion kits are available by mail order. And for small amounts of garden waste, such as a pile of weeds, a garbage bag can double as an anaerobic composting unit. Just seal it with the weeds inside and leave it outside for a few months till the weeds have completely broken down. They can then be used instead of compost, or added to it.

Conclusions

When you buy a composting bin, consider the amount of waste you want to recycle, the climatic conditions in your area, and the amount of effort you are likely to invest. Tumblers seem to work well in any conditions, aerobic bins in colder or humid regions and anaerobic bins in hot and dry weather. Of course, you can compensate for adverse conditions by adding appropriate waste ingredients or water. To produce good-quality compost, it's more important to add the right mixture of materials and to keep the compost moist than to use a particular type of bin.

Compost bins

Brand/model (in alphabetical order within types)	Manufacturer/ distributor	Price ($)*	Warranty (years)	Weight (kg)	Capacity (L)	Material	Compost characteristics
AEROBIC BINS							
AUSSIE ROTTER	Palamont Rotor	62	10	5.5	280	UV-stabilised plastic	Crumbly but layered, pleasant earthy smell, brown in colour.
RELN	Reln Plastics	25	not stated	4.6	225	100% recycled plastic	Crumbly but layered, fresh grassy smell, light green in colour (sign of incomplete decomposition).
ANAEROBIC BINS							
AURORA	Linpac Aurora	30	not stated	4.5	150	Plastic	Very lumpy, layered and wet, slight smell, dark brown in colour.
GEDYE	LR & NR Gedye	70	6	6.4	200	100% recycled plastic	Lumpy, layered and wet, slight smell, dark brown in colour.
TUMBLERS							
RAPID COMPOST TUMBLER	ComposTumbler Distributors	255	1	19.3	200	Plastic tumbler with metal frame	Crumbly and homogeneous throughout, pleasant earthy smell, brown in colour.
TUMBLEWEED Mulch Maker	Tumbleweed Mulch Maker	169	not stated	9.2	220	Plastic tumbler with metal frame	Crumbly and homogeneous throughout, pleasant earthy smell, brown in colour.

* Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in August 1994.

How we tested

Although most compost bin manufacturers recommend filling the unit in one go and then letting it mature while filling another bin, we think it's more likely people add bits of waste gradually over some time. To simulate more realistic usage conditions, we added 3 kg of food waste (both cooked and fresh, but no meat) and 400 g of torn-up newspaper twice every week. Once a fortnight we added 12 kg of garden waste (mainly grass clippings, leaves and weeds) and 1.6 kg of torn newspaper. In the tumblers, we turned the mixture as recommended.

We tested the bins through the summer and autumn months in WA. Most of the time it was hot and dry, which contributed to the moisture loss in the aerobic bins and tumblers and possibly aided the composting process in the anaerobic bins. Cooler and damper climatic conditions would probably have affected the composting process differently. Check *Compost bins: closing the cycle* on page 40 for how to compensate for adverse climatic conditions.

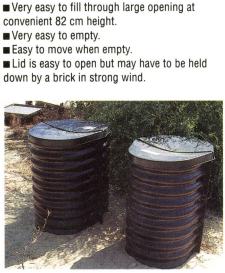
Compost characteristics

All the bins and tumblers produced compost of similarly good soil-conditioning quality. The main difference in compost from one model to another was cosmetic — consistency, smell, evenness and colour. Obviously, a crumbly, earthy-smelling substance is more pleasant to handle than heavy, smelly, layered lumps. With regard to nutrients, however, what you add to the compost is more important than which container you use.

PROFILES
Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in August 1994. Profiles are in alphabetical order within types.

AEROBIC BINS

AUSSIE ROTTER
Price: $62
Assembly
■ Assembly instructions included.
■ Easy to assemble in five minutes, though the two parts which slide together to make up the bin didn't fit very well.
Operation
■ Composting instructions included.
■ Very easy to fill through large opening at convenient 82 cm height.
■ Very easy to empty.
■ Easy to move when empty.
■ Lid is easy to open but may have to be held down by a brick in strong wind.



RELN
Price: $25
Assembly
■ Easy to assemble in 10 minutes.
■ Construction seemed flimsy; connecting strips which hold the two halves together broke easily; no spares supplied.
Operation
■ Composting instructions included.
■ Very easy to fill through large opening at convenient 75 cm height.
■ Easy to move when empty.
■ Lid is easy to open but is easily blown off in strong wind.
■ Dried out easily.
■ Horizontally corrugated wall design made it difficult to lift and empty the bin.

ANAEROBIC BINS

AURORA
Price: $30
Assembly
■ Ready-assembled,
Operation
■ No composting instructions supplied.
■ Very easy to fill through large opening at the top at convenient 82 cm height.
■ Very easy to empty and to lift.
■ Easy to move when empty.
■ Secured, hinged lid is easy to open and close.
■ Stable.

GEDYE
Price: $70
Assembly
■ Ready-assembled; only the lid needs fitting.
Operation
■ Composting instructions moulded inside the lid.
■ Very easy to fill through large opening at the top at convenient 76 cm height.
■ Very easy to empty and to lift.
■ Easy to move when empty.
■ Secured lid is easy to open and close.
■ Very stable.

TUMBLERS

RAPID COMPOST TUMBLER
Price: $255
Assembly
■ No assembly instructions but easy to assemble in 15 minutes. Spanner required.
■ Very stable, but its weight requires two people to move it when empty.
Operation
■ Composting guide included.
■ Lid easy to open and close.
■ Wheelbarrow fits underneath for easy emptying, though you might have to help the compost along around the agitation bars.
■ Easy to fill through large opening, though this is positioned rather high. Initially you have to hold the tumbler still with one hand while you add waste materials with the other.

TUMBLEWEED MULCH MAKER
Price: $169
Assembly
■ Comprehensive instructions included.
■ Screwdriver and spanner required for assembly, which takes about 20 minutes.
Operation
■ Composting instructions included.
■ Openings at each end make it easy to fill and empty.
■ Lid is easy to open and close.
■ Difficult for one person to rotate, especially when it's only half full.
■ Compost has to be emptied onto the ground, or into a lid or bag, as the bottom opening is too low to fit a wheelbarrow under it.
■ Easy to move when empty.
■ Fairly stable — only gale-force winds could blow it over.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

1 Organochlorine pesticides are commonly used for the control of termites, even though they are dangerous to our health too. Australian governments (except the NT) have agreed to ban the use of all organochlorine pesticides by mid-1995. Can you name the last two organochlorine pesticides still in use?
A) Chlordane.
B) Chlorophyll.
C) Heptachlor.
D) Hep2-Threfor.

2 The red wines of Bordeaux are famous throughout the world. A red Bordeaux wine is a blend of which four grape varieties?
A) Cabernet Franc.
B) Riesling.
C) Merlot.
D) Malbec.
E) Shiraz.
F) Cabernet Sauvignon.

3 'Botrytis' can be desirable. What is it?
A) Posterior rhinitis.
B) A fungus that attacks grapes.
C) Blurred vision.
D) An hallucinogenic (paisley) amoeba.

4 The US, as a nation, is a big consumer of guns, ammunition and motor cars. Guns and cars are both big killers of the population there. Which statement do you think is true?
A) More people in the US die from gunshot wounds than from motor car accidents.
B) Fewer people in the US die from gunshot wounds than from motor car accidents.
C) It's about the same number.

5 Older people are most likely to seriously injure themselves at home. Falls are the major cause of injury for people aged 65 and over. Where do most falls occur?
A) Stairs or steps.
B) Baths or showers.
C) Rugs.
D) Bed.

6 There is a peak time of the day for falls by older people in their homes that are serious enough to require attendance at hospital for treatment. When is this peak?
A) Before 8 am.
B) 11 am to 12 noon.
C) 7 pm to 8 pm.

ANSWERS

1. A and **C**.
2. A, C, D, F.
3. B. It can ruin the grapes or lead to the creation of luscious dessert wines. It is sometimes known as 'noble rot'.
4. B. In 1991 about 43,500 Americans died of crash-related injuries and 38,000 from gunshot wounds. Crash-related deaths have declined by around 10% over six years, while gunshot deaths increased by around 14%. Gunshot deaths already outnumber crash deaths in California, Louisiana, Nevada, New York, Texas, Virginia and the District of Columbia.
5. A. Stairs are clearly the most dangerous place. It may come as a surprise, but falls from bed are also a significant cause of injury in older people.
6. B. A second peak in serious injury due to falls takes place from 3 pm to 7 pm.

RECALLS AND BANS

If you find a recall or ban not on our list, please let us know. Companies often rent 008 or 1800 numbers for a couple of months after the recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

Sony has recalled **SONY TELEVISION RECEIVERS KV2264, KV21XRD, KV27XRD, KV2764, KV27XS and KV25XSD** (sold from 1986 to 1990) because the power switch contacts could become unreliable, causing the switch to overheat and possibly damage the TV set. Call 1800 818 444 to arrange for the switch to be replaced, free of charge, in your home.

Toyota Motor Corporation Australia has recalled **TOYOTA CAMRY MOTOR VEHICLES** (except those equipped with an airbag) manufactured between November 10, 1993, and June 2, 1994, as it's possible the steering wheel retaining nut could loosen and compromise steering control. Models involved are:
53SK10 (09018646 to 09033048),
53VK10 (09217211 to 09220816),
72SK10 (09311958 to 09315982) and
72VK10 (09377925 to 09378438).
Contact your nearest Toyota dealer for the problem to be rectified free of charge.

General Motors Holden Automotive has recalled **HOLDEN JM APOLLO MOTOR VEHICLES**, built from November 1993 to May 1994, as it's possible the steering wheel retaining nut could loosen and compromise steering control. The following models and vehicle identification numbers are involved:
4-cylinder sedan:
(6T153SD1009403941 to 6T153SD1009406408),
V6 sedan:
(6T153VD1009453694 to 6T153VD1009453818),
4-cylinder wagon:
(6T172SD1009478019 to 6T172SD1009478288),
V6 wagon:
(6T172VD1009494103 to 6T172VD1009494112).
Contact your Holden dealer to arrange for a free inspection.

Mazda Australia has recalled **MAZDA 626 (1987-1990) and 929 (1987-1989)**, as the rod actuating the door latch may detach from the front door exterior handle and fall into the path of the window. If the window is then lowered and the doors have not been locked, the door latch could be released, opening the door unexpectedly. Contact your dealer for free installation of a safety shield to protect both front door latch rods. The recall applies only to vehicles with chrome-plated exterior door handles, not those with colour-keyed handles. The following vehicles are affected:
626 (GD) 4-door sedan and 5-door hatch:
Built June 1987 to July 31, 1990.
GD1021 100001 to GD1021 103955
JMO GD 1021 00103956 to JMO GD 1021 00111191
JMO GD 1022 00200001 to JMO GD 1022 00205125
626 (GV) wagon:
Built May 1988 to July 31, 1990.
GV1021 100001 to GV1021 100870
JMO GV1021 00100871 to JMO GV1021 00101101
JMO GV1022 00200001 to JMO GV1022 00200699
929 (HC) 4-door sedan:
Built February 1987 to June 30, 1989.
HC10E1 100001 to HC10E1 112538
JMO HC10E1 00112657 to JMO HC10E1 00118073

Ford Motor Company of Australia has recalled FORD TELSTAR AT and AV MODEL motor vehicles (built from August 1987 to July 1990), as the outer front door handle may break at the point where it connects to the rod which actuates the door latch mechanism; the rod could fall into the path of the window. If the window is then lowered when the door hasn't been locked, it's possible for the latch to release and open the door. Contact your dealer for the defect to be corrected free of charge. In the meantime, lock the doors before driving off to stop them opening accidentally.

Stihl has recalled STIHL MODELS 029 and 039 FARMBOSS CHAINSAWS, as wear and vibration may cause a breakage in the earth lead. This could cause a fire if petrol is spilt in the starter housing area. Return to your nearest Stihl dealer for free replacement of the earth lead.

Target Australia has recalled NORTHERN STAR BICYCLES, BMX BOY'S BICYCLE 20" STREET THUNDER (red), and BMX GIRL'S BICYCLE 20" HOT OPTION (aqua and pink) (sold at Target stores between August 1 and September 26, 1994), as the axle bearings might not have been tightened properly, causing instability during riding. Return to Target for inspection and adjustment.

Playcorp has recalled MAGIC WIGGLERS and Magic Wigglers accessories. If the instructions accompanying the toy are not followed, the Safety Baker may melt and catch fire. Return to place of purchase for a refund.

Jurlique International has recalled JURLIQUE CHAMOMILE FLORAL WATER 30 mL SPRAY BOTTLE (Australian licence number 48793, batch number 4236), because of the high counts of micro-organisms detected during quality control testing. Return to Jurlique International, PO Box 522, Mt Barker 5251 for a refund (including the cost of postage).

Webb Distributors (Universal) has recalled the COOKOUT GAS KETTLE BARBECUE ITEM NO 41042 as the gas hose may ignite and/or become disconnected from the barbecue. Phone Webb on 1800 628 179 to arrange for return of product and refund. The barbecue is safe for use with solid fuel, so if you don't intend ever to use it with gas, call to arrange the return of the gas hose and fittings for a refund.

Franklins has recalled NO FRILLS 340 g CHOCOLATE CAKE MIX (batch codes 4242N and 4242A, use-by date August 30, 1995; and 4243A and 4243D, use-by date August 31, 1995), as part of a steel safety knife blade was found inside a packet. Return the product to the Franklins store from which it was purchased for a refund.

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